



THE MATERIALITY OF
MAGIC

edited by

Ceri Houlbrook and Natalie Armitage



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The Materiality of Magic

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*An artefactual investigation into
ritual practices and popular beliefs*

edited by

Ceri Houlbrook & Natalie Armitage



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Front cover: The coin-tree of Isle Maree, Northwest Highlands of Scotland, 2012 (Source: C. Houlbrook)
Back cover: Mangaaka *nkisi nkondi*, Manchester Museum, 2013 (Source: N. Armitage)

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Introduction: The materiality of the materiality of magic

Ceri Houlbrook & Natalie Armitage

'I am content to live a marginal scholarly existence. But I will not be happy to exchange marginality for termination.' (Oring 1998, 335)

This volume is the product of the 34th annual conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG), held in Liverpool, 2012. The editors, Natalie Armitage and Ceri Houlbrook, organised a session for this conference based on our shared academic interests. Despite hailing from different disciplines – Armitage from English and American Studies; Houlbrook from Archaeology – and despite our chronological and geographic focuses varying greatly, we share an interest in how notions of magic are manifested materially: Armitage primarily in the voodoo doll; Houlbrook, the British coin-tree.

Unified by the belief that magic, materially manifested, deserves academic attention, and that the archaeological perspective is particularly applicable to its study, we decided to collaborate on a TAG session entitled *The Materiality of Magic: An artifactual investigation into ritual practices and popular beliefs*. The papers presented during this session are gathered here in one volume.

Inspiration for this conference session was sparked during our MA years, whilst both undertaking the interdisciplinary MA programme *Constructions of the Sacred, the Holy and the Supernatural* at the University of Manchester. Despite the infectious enthusiasm of the course organiser, Dr Emma Loosley, and the broad range of subjects this MA covered, we were the only full-time students enrolled in the programme, and sadly it was disbanded in 2012, considered too small to be economically viable.

Our experience of the *Constructions of the Sacred, the Holy and Supernatural* programme was both academically rewarding and personally enjoyable, and we found ourselves questioning why so few postgraduates enrol onto this course. Any programme which spans such a wide breadth of topics, delivered by renowned experts in their fields – Tim Insoll's session on African shrines; Melanie Giles' on Iron Age burials; Viv Gardner's on the rituals of the Golden Dawn, to name only a few – should have been crawling with postgraduates. And yet it was not. The reason behind this can be, in our opinions, located in the title of the course itself: the word *supernatural*.

There are simply some words in academia which have lost their credibility – or never possessed it to begin with. *Supernatural* is one such word; *magic*, defiantly included in the title of this volume, is another. These words have become taboo; academic anathemas. We politely tiptoe around them, employing ‘safer’ substitute phrases such as *ritual*, *popular piety*, *spiritual beliefs*, and so on. And even when scholars are careful to avoid using the words *magic*, *supernatural*, *superstition*, *folklore*, etc., such studies concerned with these topics are still considered fringe; they linger on the edges of ‘respectable’ disciplines, not quite falling into academic oblivion but never managing to establish themselves as key, estimable subjects.

The topic of magic has undoubtedly been pushed to the peripheries of many disciplines and subsequently neglected, a neglect which is no doubt due to the term *magic* itself. Despite its simple definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as ‘the power of apparently influencing events by using mysterious or supernatural forces’, *magic* is a term viewed by many scholars with wariness or distrust, having been ascribed certain pejorative or sensationalist connotations.

In 1987, Ralph Merrifield observed in his book, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, that – despite ritual and magic having been part of everyday life in most societies – the associations of the subject with fantasy-fiction and occultism gave it an ‘aura of sensationalism’, and subsequently discouraged such studies (1987, xiii). This has not changed greatly in the intervening decades. In 2009, Susan Greenwood published her work *The Anthropology of Magic*, in which she notes that many disciplines are still dismissing magic as ‘bizarre and peripheral’ (2009, 1), and archaeology is little different, steering clear of the word *magic* because of its negative associations and reputation as being a little frivolous.

Folklorist Elliott Oring, whose words are quoted at the start of this Introduction, notes the ‘deep sense of shame’ (1998, 336) with which scholars of folklore and magic tend to operate; we are ‘timid’ and ‘coward’, approaching our subject-matters gingerly – even apologetically. We are reluctant to blatantly name that which we study as *magic*, *folklore*, *the supernatural*. As archaeologist Gazin-Schwartz asks in her doctoral thesis on *Constructing Ancestors: Archaeology and Folklore in Scotland*: ‘If we dare to talk about folklore, to tell stories about our sites, will anyone take us seriously? Or will we be relegated to the wacky fringe of druid-seekers?’ (1999, 36). The fear that one will not be ‘taken seriously’ evidently motivates scholars to avoid certain terminology, and words like *supernatural* and *magic* send up red flags declaring a subject to be ‘unworthy’ or ‘frivolous’.

However, in an academic environment which witnesses the births and deaths of disciplines with whiplash-inducing speed and frequency, the editors are anxious about the vulnerability of the study of magic, and are aware that the ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ processes may start to apply. The reluctance to name a subject will inevitably lead to

the subsumption or disappearance of that subject. This is why we decided to include the word *magic* in the title of our conference session and subsequent volume; we would rather risk losing readership than the subject itself. In agreement with Oring (1998), we are content to live marginal scholarly existences, but we will not be happy to exchange marginality for termination.

Material culture studies

The definitions of *magic* and *materiality* presented in this Introduction do not necessarily indicate a consensus amongst the volume contributors, who will have their own interpretations of these words. However, when we put a call out for conference papers, we had a relatively simple perception of the term *the materiality of magic*. For an interpretation of 'magic' we referred to the OED definition given above. This was intended to be as broad, impartial, and inclusive as possible, so as to encourage personal interpretations of the term and to attract contributions from a wide range of disciplines.

The word *materiality*, however, was intended to be more multi-faceted. In the context of this volume's title, it has multiple meanings and purposes. Firstly, it refers to the materiality – the significance, importance, relevance – of the study of magic, which, as demonstrated throughout this volume, proves to be an inherent aspect of societies worldwide; hence a more apt title for this volume would have been *The Materiality of the Materiality of Magic*. Secondly, it refers to the physical substance and tangibility of the artefacts and monuments, which are presented as case-studies by the contributors; artefacts and monuments which are the material manifestations of beliefs, rituals, and customs concerned with magic.

Thirdly, it is intended as an ironic juxtaposition to the word *magic*. The OED defines *material* as 'Concerned with worldly things; unspiritual', which stands in stark contrast to the *unworldly* and indubitably spiritual subject-matter of magic, implying that the *materiality of magic* is something of an oxymoron. However, we believe this to be far from the case, advocating instead the pertinence of utilising the artifactual evidence in investigations into magic, and the supposed disparity between the words *materiality* and *magic* is questioned and refuted throughout this volume. Fourthly, and finally, *materiality* is employed to indicate methodology, locating this volume within the dialogue of material culture studies.

Material culture is defined by Deetz as '*that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior*'. This definition includes all artefacts, from the simplest, such as a common pin, to the most complex, such as an interplanetary space vehicle' (1996, 35, emphases in original). It is a field of study which, according to Tilley, centres on the notion that 'persons cannot be understood

apart from things' (2006, 2); we shape our physical world according to our 'culturally determined behaviour'; and in turn we are shaped *by* our physical world. Culture and society are inseparable from the material objects we use, produce, create, consume, modify, and destroy. It is this concept which stands at the centre of material culture studies.

Regrettably, a detailed history of this field of study is beyond the scope of this Introduction, but has been dealt with in other volumes (see Buchli 2002; Tilley 2006; Hicks & Beaudry 2010), and what follows is a brief overview. The term *material culture* was first in use during the 19th century when it was primarily an anthropological concept (Buchli 2002, 2); according to Buchli, the 'emergence of material culture studies was an innovation arising from earlier Enlightenment era preoccupation with the materiality of social life' (2002, 2). However, during the inter- and post-war years, the study of material culture began to stagnate and to be perceived as an irrelevant line of enquiry; it was not until the 1970s when it was re-adopted by academia.

In what Hicks (2010) has termed the 'Material-Cultural Turn', archaeologists based at University College London and Cambridge University renewed academic interest in material culture studies during the 1970s/1980s. It emerged with renewed vigour in the disciplines of archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology – finding particular acceptance in anthropological archaeology – and in 1996, the international journal, the *Journal of Material Culture*, was first published, demonstrating wide acceptance of this field of study (Tilley 2006, 1). Today, material culture is taught in most undergraduate and postgraduate archaeology and anthropology programmes (Hicks 2010).

However, despite its popularity in archaeology and anthropology, material culture studies is considered to transcend disciplinaryity; the *Journal of Material Culture*, for example, reaches international audiences of archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, geographers, sociologists, to name only some (Tilley 2006). It is, according to Buchli, 'an intervention within and between disciplines' (2002, 13), and its inclusive ability to travel and translate between disciplines is believed to have resulted in its growing popularity across the humanities and social sciences (Buchli 2002, 18). Indeed, as Hicks and Beaudry propose, material culture studies represents not simply inter-disciplinaryity, but 'a prototype for post-disciplinaryity' (2010, 2).

This field of study, according to Tilley, 'centres on the idea that materiality is an integral dimension of culture, and that there are dimensions of social existence that cannot be fully understood without it' (2006, 1). Magic is, we believe, one such dimension of social existence which cannot be fully understood without a consideration of the material culture. We therefore propose that the employment of the methodologies and theoretical frameworks of material culture studies are central to investigations into magic and the supernatural. We do not claim that this would be a *new* development, but rather an attempt to further foster a dialogue between magic and material culture

studies; a dialogue which has been quietly, gingerly, conducted in the background of a number of disciplines for some years now.

Material culture and magic

Despite the subject of magic suffering from a pejorative or frivolous reputation, there have always been scholars willing to overlook and overcome this ill repute. Merrifield deserves special mention here; it was his book, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987), which offered the first full-length volume devoted to the materiality of magic. Attesting that ritual and magic were often aspects of everyday life, he concludes that they should leave as many traces in the archaeological record as any basic human activity, and seeks to find and catalogue them (1987, 1). Covering a wide chronological period from the pre-Roman Iron Age to the 20th century, with a geographic focus on Europe – most prominently south-eastern England – he reconstructs ritual activity, such as the deposition of witch-bottles and mummified cats, from the archaeological evidence, supplementing it wherever possible with written sources.

However, Merrifield's work has been subject to scholarly criticism, with Lloyd *et al.* (2001, 58), for example, arguing that while Merrifield offers a valuable catalogue, his purported lack of interpretation debilitates the readers' understanding of the significance of the material record. We do not fully concur with this criticism. While Merrifield's work is primarily a catalogue, he both contextualises the archaeological evidence, considering both the physical attributes and symbolic associations of 'magical' artefacts, and interprets the material record sufficiently to reconstruct the ritual activities which (probably) led to the artefacts' depositions. His interpretation of the concealed shoe, for example, takes into consideration their liminal locations, physical conditions, wide geographic distribution, folkloric connotations, and intimate associations with their previous wearers in his attempt to contextualise the artefacts and reconstruct the activities and beliefs which led to their deposition (1987, 133–135), an approach adopted by Houlbrook in her work on concealed shoes (Houlbrook 2013).

In other scholarship on the subject, folklore and beliefs in magic are not employed to elucidate the archaeological evidence, but vice versa. In cases where there are few – if any – relevant contemporaneous literary sources, the material evidence is the only surviving testament to the custom, and subsequently the only contextualising resource available. Howard (1951), for example, focuses her attention on the deposition of mummified cats within the walls of domestic buildings in Britain, pre-empting Merrifield by utilising the archaeological evidence – the liminality of their locations; their arrangements; and the level of effort involved in deposition – to determine the possible reasons behind deposition. In her careful analysis, she resists over-interpreting the material evidence, concluding that the majority of the cats were probably employed as vermin-scares or

were accidentally enclosed. She does, however, make a convincing argument for some of her case-studies having been deposited as foundation sacrifices.

Hoggard (2004) likewise utilises the material evidence of his broad survey of apotropaic devices – witch-bottles, horse skulls, dried cats, shoes, and so on, which are all material manifestations of folkloric practices and beliefs – discovered within domestic buildings, in order to argue that the employment of counter-witchcraft practices far antedated the witch-trials, and that the decline of magic during the early modern period was slow and prolonged. This is a theory which the biased written sources, penned as they primarily were by the literate minority, do not attest to, demonstrating how invaluable the archaeological evidence is in contextualising such customs.

There have been a number of other volumes which consider the materiality of magic, most of which focus on one specific geographic region. Faraone's *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (1991), for example, explores the material evidence for magical practices specifically in ancient Greece. Trzcionka's *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth Century Syria* (2006) utilises both archaeological and literary sources in an investigation into the 'magical' practices of antique Syria and Palestine, from amulets and curses to the methods involved in exorcism. Hedeager's *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400–1000* (2011) considers the material embodiment of Scandinavian mythology, employing an interdisciplinary approach by using literature as well as archaeology.

Other scholars with an interest in the materiality of magic have offered broader geographic and chronological perspectives; for example, the seminal work of Gazin-Schwartz (1999a; 1999b; 2001; 2011), particularly her collaborative volume with Cornelius Holtorf, *Archaeology and Folklore* (1999b). This volume is a collection of papers from the 1996 TAG session, coincidentally also held at Liverpool, exploring the relationship between the disciplines of Archaeology and Folklore, and how they can complement each other. The theoretical approaches are diverse, as is the geographic spectrum to an extent, with case-studies drawn from Western Europe, the Mediterranean and North America. However, as the title suggests, it is primarily concerned with the folklore – legends and traditional tales – associated with historic sites, as opposed to the material manifestations of magic.

Timothy Insoll's *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion* (2011), offers another example of work which broadly considers how archaeology contributes to an understanding of ritual and religion. This work marks a turning point in the subject-area; whereby, according to Insoll, there has been a 'shift from the cataloguing of the residues of the archaeology of ritual and religions to thinking about what they encode ... and how this is achieved materially through engaging with materiality' (2011, 3–4). Insoll's *Handbook* is similar to this volume in that it offers interpretive studies of rituals and religions, ranging broadly in chronology and geography, from an archaeological

perspective. It differs, however, in that it is a consideration of ritual and religion, a vast subject area, while this volume has the much narrower – and less orthodox – focus of magic.

Wallis and Lymer's (2001) edited volume, *A Permeability of Boundaries? New Approaches to the Archaeology of Art, Religion and Folklore*, has the most in common with this volume. This archaeological monograph is a collection of 13 papers delivered at a conference of the same name, hosted by the University of Southampton in 1999. The papers present, as the title suggests, new approaches to the archaeology of art, religion and folklore. Their geographic and chronological focuses are widely varied, ranging from the prehistoric Caribbean to contemporary India, but they are united in the editors' desires to relocate art, religion and folklore – which they present as 'fringe' subjects and 'alternative' archaeology – firmly within academia once more.

The work of Wallis and Lymer, however, differs from this volume in that the word *magic* is substituted by the 'safer' phrases of *folklore* and *religion*. Additionally, this collection of papers was compiled in 2001, at a time when – according to Richard Bradley, who penned the foreword – archaeologists had begun to reconsider the value of subjects they had previously consigned to 'the fringe'. If, therefore, 2001 marked the re-emergence of religion, folklore, and magic into the discipline of archaeology, this volume – published over a decade later – aims to consider how far out of the periphery these subjects have travelled after ten years.

Attempting a balance

As invaluable as the material evidence undoubtedly is in elucidating beliefs and customs which centre on magic, especially where literary sources are absent, there is a risk of over-interpretation. In less scholarly pieces, archaeological finds have been appropriated to substantiate sensationalist claims. In 2008, for example, the remains of birds and eggs discovered in a pit in Cornwall were presented as evidence of 17th-century witchcraft (Ravilious 2008), while in 2011, the discovery of a mummified cat in the ruins of a 17th-century cottage in Pendle, Lancashire, was the only evidence cited in the proposal that the cottage had housed one of the Pendle witches (Anonymous 2011).

Although amateurs, as above, are often more likely to over-interpret the evidence, employing it to make sensationalist claims, academic scholars can be equally guilty of this. Concealed garments, for example, are often presented as material evidence of magical practices, but in some cases it is clear that accidental loss is as likely an explanation as ritual deposition. Items such as caps, shirts, doublets, and trousers discovered within the roof-spaces, walls and beneath the floors of buildings may indeed be evidence of foundation sacrifices or apotropaism, but more secular explanations should be sought and disproved first.

For example, in her analysis of a cache of concealed garments – consisting of a child's doublet and cap, an 18th-century pocket, five coins, a trade token, and some document fragments – in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, Dinah Eastop, of the Textile Conservation Centre, focuses on the child's doublet and cap in order to speculate that the cache was concealed to protect the household against infant deaths or to promote fertility (2001, 80). She pays little attention to the less symbolically-charged items – the trade token and the document fragments – the presence of which suggests that this cache may have been concealed for more secular purposes; possibly as memorials or to ensure the artefacts' longevity.

Likewise, Ian Evans, in his doctoral thesis on concealed garments in Australia, lists a straw hat, convict shirts, and a sailor's cap – all discovered in a variety of domestic and public buildings – as garments which were deliberately concealed for their probable powers as apotropaic devices (2010, 172). As with Eastop's cache, however, numerous other reasons could have motivated the concealment of these garments: memory, safe-keeping, or accidental losses. The discovery of two convict shirts in a prison, for example, is not necessarily evidence of a belief in supernatural powers.

Gazin-Schwartz warns of such over-interpretation by way of a personal anecdote in her doctoral thesis (1999). She recounts how, upon discovering a horseshoe inserted into the wall of a ruined 19th-century croft house in Skye, she immediately assumed folkloric motivations for its deposition, noting both its liminal location and the horseshoe's history as a protective amulet. However, it was later explained to her that horseshoes were commonly placed within the walls for the utilitarian purpose of supporting the timber posts (1999, 58). In her opinion, however, the risk of over-interpretation does not outweigh the benefits of employing archaeology in the study of magic and folklore – so long as they are carefully interpreted and considered in context. As she wryly notes: 'Archaeologists, of course, should not have to be told to consider context!' (1999, 36).

The drawbacks of studying the materiality of magic are thus two-fold. Whilst some scholars are reluctant to associate themselves with the word *magic* and avoid the subject-matter entirely, there are others who are over-eager and too ready to ascribe magical purposes to obscure archaeological finds. Kyriakidis (2007) terms this 'overreaching', noting that the appeal of ritualistic interpretations 'can lead to a distorted picture of the archaeological record' (2007, 2); mundane objects and activities can be misinterpreted as magical because of the exciting lure of ritual and the supernatural.

As Kyriakidis sums up, 'in archaeology, ritual activities tend to be either over-imaginatively reconstructed or avoided entirely' (2007, 2). This volume attempts to find a middle-ground; to firmly locate magic as a subject worthy – and in need – of academic attention whilst simultaneously avoiding 'overreaching'. Through close consideration of context, we hope to illustrate that enquiries into the materiality of magic are not necessarily the products of over-interpretation but of *skilled* interpretation.

The papers

In putting a call out for papers, we had hoped to encourage researchers from a variety of disciplines to contribute; researchers who may have felt, as we do, that magic should be brought back from the fringes of disciplines and given a more established academic platform. We wanted papers which investigated the ways in which beliefs in magic are manifested materially; which highlighted how monuments and artefacts can prove invaluable sources in such studies. We were not disappointed.

The range of proposals we received surprised us. Material culture is, as explored above, a field of study which transcends disciplines, but we had not expected magic to similarly prove so inter-disciplinary. With contributors hailing from Archaeology, Anthropology, History, and English and American Studies, and their focuses ranging in chronology and geography from the Neolithic Near-East, Bronze Age Denmark and Ireland, Roman-Britain and medieval England, to contemporary Africa and modern-day Scotland, the papers presented at the conference demonstrate the prevalence of magic worldwide, regardless of time period. The number of proposals for papers also demonstrated that many researchers across disciplines – ranging from postgraduates to professors – are willing, even eager, to engage with the concept of magic.

The success of the conference also took us by surprise. During the morning session, our room capacity proved inadequate and people were forced to stand at the back to listen to our papers; by the afternoon, therefore, we had been upgraded to a larger conference room. Although we would like to take credit for our session's unforeseen popularity, we believe that the large volume of conference guests chose to attend our session because they were interested in the subject-matter itself; they wanted to hear about the materiality of magic – evidence that this is a more popular topic than previously thought. And judging by the number of debates our session sparked, scholars are evidently intrigued by the concept of magic and the theoretical frameworks employed to engage with it.

The papers presented and reproduced in this volume testify to the accuracy of our session title: *The Materiality of Magic*. As explained above, the title refers both to the importance of the study of magic and to the applicability of an archaeological viewpoint. As Merrifield asserts – and as the papers in this volume will validate – magic and ritual ‘can be studied objectively like any other human behaviour, and archaeology can make a major contribution towards its investigation’ (1987, 184).

Opening this volume is Peter Leeming's paper “Also found... (not illustrated)...”: The curious case of the missing magical fossils’. Leeming observes the neglect fossils often suffer from when discovered in Neolithic and Bronze Age contexts in Britain and Ireland, usually only noted in passing in archaeological reports and rarely illustrated. Drawing on the often incidental details offered in archaeological reports, along with the work of Kenneth Oakley of the British Museum, Leeming considers the possible

symbolic and apotropaic usages of fossils, suggesting that these objects were perceived of historically as possessing magical agency.

The second chapter, 'Arranged artefacts and materials in Irish Bronze Age ritual deposits: A consideration of prehistoric practice and intention', is penned by Katherine Leonard. Leonard's geographic and chronological focus is the Irish Bronze Age, and she offers ritual interpretations of grouped artefacts carefully arranged during deposition. Drawing on examples such as the Early Bronze Age 'hoard' from a river channel at Carhan, Co. Kerry, where 10–11 axes were arranged in a circle, cutting-edges facing outwards, around a deposit of wood ash and deer bone fragments, Leonard uses the material evidence to argue that a ritual intention is communicated through the precise arrangement of objects relative to each other.

Adrian Chadwick examines the materialities of magic in Iron Age and Romano-British settlement sites in the third chapter, 'Doorways, ditches and dead dogs – excavating and recording material manifestations of practical magic amongst later prehistoric and Romano-British communities'. Focusing on two large-scale, open-area investigations of settlement sites with which Chadwick was involved – Wattle Sykes, West Yorkshire, and Barton Seagrave, Northamptonshire – he examines the material evidence for practical magic present at these, and various other, sites. He also draws on personal experience in outlining the logistical problems of attempting such magic-oriented analyses of the material evidence in commercial archaeology, *e.g.* time constraints.

The fourth chapter, 'Domestic magic and the walking dead in medieval England: A diachronic approach', is written by Stephen Gordon, who explores the material evidence testifying to the ways in which the medieval household was protected against malevolent supernatural forces, particularly the walking dead. Gordon aims to demonstrate that, whilst archaeological studies into the fear of the walking dead have largely focused on apotropaic strategies conducted at grave-sites, mapping written medieval sources onto the often obscure or overlooked material evidence reveals that other techniques – *e.g.* the employment of threshold deposits – were observed in domestic contexts.

Natalie Armitage's paper, 'European and African figural ritual magic: The beginnings of the voodoo doll myth' explores figurative ritual magic practices from Europe and how they may have influenced the reading of figures from Africa to establish the roots of the common misconception about the origins and nature of the voodoo doll as it is widely perceived today. Armitage focuses on how the material form of the Kongo *nkisi nkondi* would have been viewed and interpreted by the contemporary European observer, establishing a basis for the prevalent misinterpretations of African culture as it moved to the Americas and evolved into the religion and magical traditions of Haitian *Vodou*.

The sixth chapter, 'Binding spells and curse tablets through time', written by Debora Moretti, explores the chronologically and geographically widespread phenomenon of curse tablets. Considering such elements as the sympathetic use of specific materials

and the liminal natures of their places of deposition, Moretti aims to demonstrate that the curse tablet is the ideal material object for illustrating how magical practices are evinced in the archaeological record. Moretti also considers the part played by modern perceptions of magic in the difficulties involved in analysing such material evidence.

Ceri Houlbrook's paper, 'The wishing-tree of Isle Maree: The evolution of a Scottish folkloric practice', takes as its starting point a 'wishing-tree' created in April 2012 on the shores of Loch Maree, Scotland, as part of a local festival. Employing a diachronic approach, Houlbrook demonstrates that, whilst this wishing-tree is a contemporary structure, its history can be traced back to the 1700s: to the original wishing-tree on Isle Maree itself. Houlbrook explores the numerous recontextualisations this custom has undergone since the 18th century and argues that a consideration of the custom's shifting materiality demonstrates the versatile nature of ritual.

The eighth chapter, '*Ciki* and *jiki*: The inner and outer layers of healers' workspaces in Madina, Accra', is written by Bryn Trevelyan James, who draws on two seasons of fieldwork with traditional healers in Ghana in order to explore anthropomorphic symbolism in the ordering of practitioners' workspaces. Examining the construction of both real and imagined boundaries between activity areas, James considers the applicability of mapping the Hausa medical concepts of an Outer layer (*jiki*) and an Inner core (*ciki*) of the human body onto the architectural workspaces of traditional healers.

This volume is concluded with 'The Little Mannie with his daddy's horns', a paper penned by John Prag, Professor Emeritus of Archaeological Studies and of Classics, of Manchester Museum. Prag's frank, amusing and highly insightful account of Manchester Museum's acquisition and subsequent treatment of 'little mannie' – initially thought to be a Celtic head – speaks of the importance of archaeological context in determining the origin of an object. It also demonstrates the perceived power of such objects, even in a modern day setting.

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‘Also found ... (not illustrated) ...’: The curious case of the missing magical fossils

Peter Leeming

Introduction

Anatomically modern humans and other Hominids have utilised fossils, or fossiliferous stones, since at least the Middle Palaeolithic for a variety of reasons. These include decoration as well as functional utility. What is more difficult to decipher is the symbolic usage of such items. Kenneth Oakley, of the British Museum (Natural History) held the opposite view. Through his studies of archaeological examples and folklore relating to fossils (Oakley 1965a; 1965b; 1971; 1973; 1975; 1977; 1978; 1981; 1985), he became convinced about their magical usage, initially through late 19th-century anthropological views about animism and fetishism and finally settling on the description of the fossils as charms. This paper will add some more evidence in the form of further archaeological sites with fossils where they have been noted in passing and usually not illustrated. Further study of these and Oakley’s examples may suggest that magical usage was one of the main criteria for selection of these objects.

Stating the problem

When archaeologists meet in relaxed or relaxing circumstances, like any profession, they share tales and anecdotes. One of the most common of these concerns questions asked by the general public, such as: ‘Have you found any gold?’ and any question about Romans (especially Roman Roads ...) etc., usually reported with ever-greater vehemence in proportion to the perceived lack of understanding of what it is that archaeologists actually do. One example of this illustrates the subject of this paper: ‘Have you found any dinosaurs?’

This has been sufficiently irritating to some that there is now for sale in the USA a clothing range with the message ‘Archaeologists don’t dig Dinosaurs’ boldly emblazoned upon it (<http://www.cafepress.com/shovelbums/2527142>). But by extension – archaeologists do not dig fossils. This attitude has led to the phenomenon in archaeological interpretation of fossils found by Anatomically Modern Humans and their ancestors being ignored or

passed over. This paper seeks to illustrate this by examining examples from the Neolithic and Bronze Age of Great Britain and Ireland.

Surprisingly, although this is a time period and geographical area that have been intensively studied, there are lacunae in the research. Ann Woodward, in discussing exotic substances found in barrows, notes that despite all of the attention focused on this type of monument, ‘... there are many other items within the grave groups that have *never been studied in detail*. These are the objects made from stone, bone and shell’ (Woodward 2000, 111, emphasis inserted). In her more detailed list of such objects she includes fossils.

To a certain extent this is paralleled by the neglect of magical objects, or those that are deemed to be magical. Leslie Grinsell, in an examination of evidence for witchcraft at prehistoric sites, cites the burial from Hvidegård, Denmark:

Finally, there remains the problem of trying to identify, from objects found accompanying primary and secondary burials in barrows and other burials of Neolithic and Bronze Age, witch-doctors of those periods. A Danish Bronze Age grave yielded the claw of a lynx, bones of a weasel, vertebrae of snakes, horses’ teeth, a rowan twig, charcoal of asken, and iron pyrites, all interpreted as relics connected with witchcraft. (1973, 78)

He concludes with an important point: ‘Clearly in such matters a good deal depends upon the interpretation which the director of excavations decides to place on his finds’ (Grinsell 1973, 78).

For Hvidegård and other Scandinavian examples, see Goldhahn (2012) where the finds and the bag they were discovered in are discussed. As an aside, it is interesting that the fossils from Aveline’s Hole, Somerset, which are mainly sections of ammonites, were thought by Donovan (1968) to have patterns of wear consistent with being carried in a pouch or bag. He also notes that associated with ammonites were the following: flint tools, part of a deer tibia, incisor tooth of horse, upper canine of pig and eighteen incisors of red deer. Donovan suggested magical usage as one of the possible interpretations of the fossils (1968, 240–241).

Such suggestions are usually heavily qualified. An unwillingness to speculate on purported meaning or significance has permeated modern excavation reports and syntheses. The key text, Merrifield’s pioneering study of archaeology and magic (1987), deals with the difficulties of identifying such magical objects, but does not discuss fossils in any depth. As fossils were, and in some quarters still are (*e.g.* China), held to be apotropaic (Kennedy 1976), they seem to be doubly damned and both factors may be at work in some of the examples which follow. This lack of research into magical items is beginning to be redressed, for example as seen in the titles (at least) of studies of Beakers and metalwork from the Bronze Age of north-east Scotland, *Powerful Pots* (Shepherd 1986) and *Magic Metal* (Cowie 1988), and by other studies including this

volume. Reference to magical properties of other material, such as jet and amber, is also now being considered in studies of such material (Alison Sheridan, pers. comm.), where those materials have strange properties of lightness, electrostatic charge and in amber's case, the quality of floating in certain circumstances. Ordinary fossils could resemble living organisms, but be heavy and made of stone or be of the wrong size, being too large or small, and others could resemble nothing living, all conditions which could be explained by concepts of magic.

One writer who did consider such issues was Kenneth Page Oakley, founder and head of the Sub-Department of Anthropology at the British Museum (Natural History). He is best known as one of the British scientists who exposed the Piltdown Man fraud (Oakley and Hoskins 1950). He researched fossils in folklore and further extended his studies to discussing their decorative and symbolic usage, as well as their practical use and re-use. In a series of papers beginning with 'Folklore of Fossils' in *Antiquity* (Oakley 1965a; 1965b), he proposed three categories of meaning for fossils found on archaeological sites: (a) *objets trouvés* being regarded as 'lucky'; (b) containing magical power or an object of specific belief (Oakley used the now problematic categories of animism and fetish); and (c) those that had degenerated to once again be regarded as an object conferring good luck. Oakley suggested their potential for archaeologists, describing them as 'a legacy of prehistoric theology' (1965a, 10). Many of the fossils discovered on archaeological sites were still collected and used as charms and amulets during the 20th century and were discussed as such in folklore, leading Oakley to be more convinced that a similar phenomenon was at work in prehistoric times. The development of his thought is shown in later writings where the use of animism and fetish in his schema are replaced by talk of amulets and charms, magical items.

It is this latter category which movement beyond the impasse about unmodified objects may be achieved. Archaeologists have been reluctant to discuss fossils from sites because emphasis has been upon archaeology as the interpretation of actions of past people. This has been somewhat narrowly confined to objects which show human action, flint that has been knapped etc. The elephant in the room is probably the eolith, naturally formed stones which resembled tools and were the subject of much controversy in the 20th century. Fossils found on archaeological sites are often unmodified and therefore not deemed to be evidence of human activity unless (a) there are no such fossils discovered in the locality; (b) if the position within the site is highly suggestive of deliberate placement; or (c) a combination of both. Because of this, these items are often not included in the site report or are given a cursory mention. However, if these objects are interpreted as possibly deliberately deposited and as having magical significance for the depositors, a different picture begins to emerge. This is not to say that all of the fossils were deliberately placed, but it is becoming increasingly clear that many were. Some examples are:

Woodhenge, Wiltshire

This site had two discussions of its finds using a theoretical tool of structured deposition published in the same year. Fossils were noted by Julian Thomas as being discovered in the post-holes at Woodhenge in his general discussion (Thomas 1996, 150). But Pollard's (1996) more detailed study of structured deposition at Woodhenge does not even mention the fossils. Bradley (2000), discussing Pollard's study, again does not mention the fossils. According to the excavator, Maud Cunnington, the fossils were found in holes C5, C7 and E14 and all were echinoids – sea urchins (Cunnington 1929).

Wilsford Shaft, Wiltshire

Four fossil fragments of an echinoid were discovered at the bottom of this important site. They are not discussed or illustrated, but a perforated fossil fish vertebra, found with amber beads from the same level, near the very bottom of the 100 ft (30.48 m) deep shaft, is shown (Ashbee *et al.* 1989).

West Kennet Long Barrow, Wiltshire

Piggott's excavations discovered the following material, none of which made it into the final publication: a fossiliferous oolitic stone slab, found in the rubble under a blocking stone at the entrance, two crinoids found in the dry walling on the north-west side of the south-east chamber and a fossil found amongst the paving stones in the north-west chamber (all information from Wiltshire Heritage on-line catalogue).

Amesbury Archer Bronze Age burial

This burial, one of the richest in terms of grave goods, omits detailed discussion of several items discovered with the burial:

One small fossil ... was recovered from the fill during excavation, but as 15 small fossil sponges, a shark's tooth, and four other fossils were recovered from the sieving of the grave fill, it is not considered likely that the fossil was deliberately placed in the grave. (Dagless *et al.* 2013, 71)

Ballycarty Chambered Tomb, Co. Kerry, Ireland

The detailed discussion of the discovery of fossils (which are illustrated) in the chamber of the passage tomb at Ballycarty, is relegated to almost the last appendix of the report

(Wyse Jackson in Connolly 1999). Although the author notes that it 'is not possible that these fossils could have been incorporated into the passage tomb... through natural erosion processes. Rather, they were collected purposely by the builders of the tomb and placed within it' (1999, 90), they are mentioned very briefly in the main discussion. In a further publication (and a geological publication at that) they are described as palaeontological finds rather than archaeological artefacts (Wyse Jackson and Connolly 2002).

Dunstable Downs, Bedfordshire

The Dunstable Downs Bronze Age burial was published by a local antiquary Worthington George Smith. He reconstructed the burial from hundreds of fragments after it had been uncovered by a steam-plough. After collecting the material, which included 100–300 sea urchin fossils, from the damaged site, Smith imaginatively drew them as a surrounding border around the mother and child burials. Their exact positions in the burial are not known, neither is the exact number recovered (Dyer 1978). The burial was reconstructed and displayed for many years in the entrance hall of a local school, where the pupils seem to have added to the number of echinoids, making an exact number virtually impossible to discover (James Dyer, pers. comm.).

Kiltierney Deerpark, Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland

At the excavation of a stone circle at Kiltierney Deerpark, an Early Bronze Age cemetery was discovered. One of the burials, no. 4, had three fragments of pottery and the following as grave goods: 'Thirty Crinoid ossicles were present, varying in size from 6mm to 1.5mm. These could perhaps have served as beads, but occur as fossils in the local limestone' (Daniels *et al.* 1977, 39). Beads made from crinoids are probably the most frequently discovered fossils in Bronze Age burials: several were discovered and some are illustrated in Colt Hoare's mammoth work on south Wiltshire (Colt Hoare 1812).

This latter site illustrates the first part of the title of this paper perfectly. Taken as a whole, the fossils are the largest group of all of the finds discovered in the stone circle excavation, with all of the others numbering just over 20, including an intrusive medieval metal fragment. This fragment is illustrated, the fossils are not; yet the crinoids ossicles could be a necklace. If these 'beads' were unambiguous, such as if they were made of jet or amber, no doubt more would have been made of them, but the suspicion as to whether the crinoids were archaeological or not has led to their virtual exclusion from the published report. Thus consideration of their nature as unusual and possibly magical items has not entered the archaeological literature.

Conclusion

The ‘missing’ fossils in the interpretation of the above sites, either missing as illustrations or from detailed analysis (or both), are a hindrance to our understanding; evidence is being ignored or marginalised. Rather than dismiss such finds as background noise or palaeontological discoveries, perhaps archaeologists should be more open to considering them as potential evidence for magical beliefs?

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They and all others mentioned here are not to blame for any of the content.

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Arranged artefacts and materials in Irish Bronze Age ritual deposits: A consideration of prehistoric practice and intention

Katherine Leonard

Introduction

Past analysis of European Bronze Age deliberate deposits often concentrated on the composition of assemblages and linked the deposition of these objects to economic strategies, such as taking metal out of circulation to increase demand or controlling the acquisition of metals by competitors (Bradley 1985; Kristiansen 1989). It is possible that such motivations contributed to the ritual deposition of large volumes of objects and materials in Bronze Age Ireland. However, a closer inspection of the evidence for deposition and the patterns of activity that emerge, demonstrates that these practices were much more complex. Factors including location, audience and participants, choice of objects/materials, and the activities surrounding the deposition all combine to create the archaeological record of the depositional act and are all relevant to the interpretation where accessible.

It has also long been held that the purpose behind some deliberate deposits was votive (*e.g.* ensure agricultural fertility, to give thanks for a successful battle, etc.). In other words they have been viewed as gifts to the gods, essentially non-live sacrifices which have left the human sphere and become ‘other’ once they are deposited. Votive deposits are therefore also seen as indicative of communication and interaction taking place between the real world and an ‘other’ world, since the depositor(s) may be surrendering the object in order to ask for assistance from, or give thanks to, a ‘supernatural’ source.

More recent analyses of deliberate deposition have focused on the socio-cultural context of the practice (Osborne 2004; Fontijn 2008; Chadwick 2012). For instance, if conducted in front of an audience the performance of a deposition could have acted as a mechanism to highlight relative social status. Some would have accumulated the correct object(s) to deposit and others would have observed this taking place (similar to how charitable donations raise the positive public profile of wealthy individuals today). In addition to individuals, public depositions of high status objects like metalwork may have also acted to boost the relative social status of kin-groups or lineages. Of course,

it is likely that some members of the community would have never been able to make these types of ‘high status’ depositions (perhaps over generations). They may have made different types of deposits for which there is no clear archaeological evidence, but it is unlikely that these would have had the same social repercussions as would depositing an object like a bronze cauldron or sword.

While other studies have focused on the locations of deposition in Bronze Age Europe (Bradley and Yates 2010; Fontijn 2002; Cleary 2007), the deposited objects themselves (Eogan 2007; Bridgford 1997; Cahill 1995), and/or the socio-cultural motivation behind the deposition (Bradley 1990; O’Flaherty 1995; Hansen 2013), this paper discusses the *physical action of depositing* as evidenced through the arrangement of objects in multiple object deposits. Such precise placement of objects in some Irish Bronze Age deliberate deposits suggests a specific intention communicated through the practice of deposition. Accordingly, when the physical act of depositing is archaeologically discernible, it demonstrates a degree of precision and care taken, and hints at the ceremony/performativity and embodied experience conceivably essential to the practice (Needham 2001, 294).

The find contexts of the majority of Irish Bronze Age objects suggest that the depositional action taken, the type of object deposited, and the location of deposition were the important factors. Generally, the spatial relationship between the objects does not appear to have been noticeably considered by those who performed the deposition. This can be observed with objects deposited in still water, where the manner in which they sunk and eventually rested could not be controlled. However, there are exceptional examples where the arrangement of objects in relation to each other was an obvious factor in the process of deposition. For the purposes of this paper these will be termed ‘carefully arranged deposits’.

Depositional practice in Bronze Age Ireland

A comprehensive analysis of depositional practice in Bronze Age Ireland was conducted by Becker for her doctoral thesis and an overview of this has been recently published (Becker 2006; 2013). As noted by Becker, there is evidence of deliberate deposition taking place in Ireland throughout prehistory, but it is at the end of the Irish Middle Bronze Age (c. 1200 BC) when an exponential increase in the number of depositions begins, which is accompanied by an increase in the volume of material being deposited in both single and multiple object deposits. In the Late Bronze Age, especially in its final Dowris Phase, the volume of the objects deposited increases to its highest point and then seems to drop off at the beginning of the Iron Age (c. 600 BC). The multiple object deposits of the Dowris Phase are much more variable than the depositions which took place in earlier periods in Ireland, which reflects both the increased variety of objects

available and an increase in the acceptability of a wide range of objects as deliberate deposits (Becker 2006; 2013). Becker also contextualised the Irish material in relation to contemporary depositional practices elsewhere in Europe (see also Hansen 2013 for a discussion of hoarding practice in the Bronze Age of Western Europe):

The material record of prehistoric Ireland differs significantly from that in other European regions. Most striking is the lack of artefacts from settlement sites throughout the Bronze Age and the lack of non-ceramic burial goods after the EBA. The overwhelming majority of artefacts are found in the natural landscape, in rivers and bogs and to a significant extent on dry land (Becker 2013, 4).

There are a number of patterns in the deliberate depositions conducted in Bronze Age Ireland which were identified and/or affirmed by Becker in her doctoral thesis, and that she concludes are representative of deliberate choices on the part of the depositors (2006, 9). Becker divides the types of locations where (single- and multiple-object) depositions took place in Bronze Age Ireland into rivers, bogs, and dryland, and the types of objects deposited are categorised as bladed weapons, gold ornaments, ceremonial objects, and axes. Bogs received all types of objects, while only bladed weapons and axes were deposited in rivers, and gold ornaments, axes, and to a minimal extent bladed weapons have been found in dryland contexts (Becker 2008, 14, fig. 3). The Irish Bronze Age record is further complicated by the fact that deposition took place on settlements as well as at 'natural' locations with no evidence for human-made constructions, such as rock-clefts. However, in Ireland 'wet' environments by far received the largest volume of objects/materials deposited in the Bronze Age and in some cases particular locations, such as stretches of river or areas of bog, were repeatedly returned to over long periods of time for the purpose of deposition (Bourke 2001). Returning to the same location to perform the same type of ritual action suggests that the intention behind the ritual practice and/or the communication taking place was similar on each occasion.

Two valuable catalogues have been produced which detail the find circumstances and condition of Irish Bronze Age multiple object depositions. Eogan's (1983) catalogue 'Hoards of the Irish Later Bronze Age' includes 161 Irish hoards (containing objects in known association) from the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) to the end of the Late Bronze Age (LBA). Of these only five have recorded circumstances of discovery which note careful arrangement of the objects at time of deposition: Downpatrick I, Co. Down (cat. no. 14); Downpatrick II, Co. Down (cat. no. 15); Derrinboy, Co. Offaly (cat. no. 24); Seacon More, Co. Antrim (cat. no. 41); and Blackhills, Co. Laois (cat. no. 24). The first three date to the MBA, and the latter two to the LBA. In Becker's (2006) catalogue three from the Early Bronze Age (EBA) can be identified: Carhan, Co. Kerry (cat. no. 4); Toormore, Co. Cork (cat. no. 28); and Knockaun, Co. Waterford (cat. no. 56). The recent find at Tamlaght Hoard, Co. Armagh (Becker 2006, cat. no. 249), brings the LBA arranged deposits to three. In this instance a sword was lying horizontally along the

ground surface oriented with its tip to the north-north-west and with Fuschsstadt-Type and Jenišovice-Type vessels (one within the other) placed to the south-south-east of the sword's hilt, perhaps aligned with the area of wetter ground at the edge of which the deposit was made (Queen's University Belfast 2004, 1; Warner 2006).

Similar types of deposits have been noted across Europe throughout the Bronze Age, for instance in the depositions sometimes categorised as *Sonderpositionierung*. Brück provides two Late Bronze Age examples from England: at the site of Cock Hill, Sussex, ten loomweights were arranged in a line at the base of a pit located within a hut; at South Dumpton Down, Kent, on the base of a pit cut into the side of the ditch four palstaves placed on their edges were arranged in a fan-shape over which was placed a slab of tabular flint, in a later fill of the same pit a bracelet and a fragment of a bracelet were placed over another palstave (Brück 2006, 299). Therefore, like many of the depositional patterns noted for the Irish Bronze Age the careful arrangement of objects is reflective of a regional expression of a broad Europe-wide pattern of practice.

Carefully arranged deposits could be conceived of as a sub-category of structured deposition, as could other depositional trends which have been observed such as objects inserted into other objects prior to deposition (see Hill 1996 for a discussion of the categorisation of deposits as structured). Although such categorisation will be to some degree subjective, as O'Flaherty states in relation to the use of the term 'hoard': 'Categorisation represents a way of controlling and managing subject-matter that otherwise might prove too unwieldy for analysis' (1995, 12). To categorise a deposit as structured it must be demonstrated that those conducting the deposition made intentional choices regarding what objects or materials to place together, in what manner, and at what location. This can be seen with the deposit from Carhan, Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry, where ten or eleven Early Bronze Age copper flat axe-heads were arranged with their cutting edges pointing out in a circle surrounding a collection of ash, deer bone, and antler fragments. This deposit had been placed in a hollow/pit under a large stone in the middle of what is now a small stream (Waddell 1998, 126). In this case there can be no doubt that the depositor intended to deposit these objects and materials in a particular way.

In most cases the contextual information of Irish Bronze Age objects was not recorded upon their recovery and thus the relative frequency of the careful arrangement of objects at time of deposition cannot be ascertained (Eogan 1983; Becker 2006, 33–37). Although there are not many recorded instances of carefully arranged depositions, there is also no period-bias across the Irish Bronze Age, which suggests a consistency over a long period of time. Therefore, though careful arrangement was not conducted in all instances of deliberate deposition, this was a repeated practice. Further, it is not unreasonable to assume that some of the multiple object depositions which do not have recorded circumstances of discovery were also carefully arranged, but that this

arrangement was not noticed by the modern finders. Nevertheless, careful arrangement is not a feature of all deliberate Bronze Age deposits with recorded circumstances of discovery. Therefore, it is proposed that careful arrangement was a practice enacted in some instances of deposition, but was not a necessary component of Irish Bronze Age deliberate deposition generally.

The manner of arrangement is generally different for each group of objects, suggesting that the arrangement is not linked to an overarching and/or fixed pattern of deposition. Interestingly there is one known Irish Bronze Age example where a repeated pattern of arrangement can be seen. Repetition was seen in the two exceptional hoards found 10m apart on Cathedral Hill, Downpatrick, Co. Down (Proudfoot 1955). The larger deposit contained eleven penannular gold bracelets (ten intact, one halved) and one penannular neck ring fragment. The neck ring and the halved bracelet had both been fragmented with one clean chisel cut from each side. These objects were inserted into a narrow pit, which seemed to have been dug for the purpose, one on top of the other with the smallest bracelet at the bottom and the largest at the top, with soil then packed around them. At the top of the 'stack' were the three largest objects, separated from the other objects by 22 mm of fill. Stones were then placed around and over the mouth of the hole. The smaller of the two hoards contained four penannular gold bracelets, all intact and undecorated but one unsmoothed, which were stacked in an identical manner and in a similarly shaped pit as the larger hoard. Stones were also placed over the top of the pit (Proudfoot 1955). The objects placed in these two deposits are not identical, but they are similar, deposited in a very similar mode and located very close to each other. Those who deposited one of these hoards clearly had knowledge of how the other was arranged during the depositional act (if they were not deposited during the same event).

Perhaps the factor which most clearly sets carefully arranged depositions apart from the other categories of Irish Bronze Age depositional practice is that the carefully arranged deposits stress control. The arrangement of the objects appears to be purposeful and intentional, thus implying a perceived control over the outcome of what is here suggested to be a ritual practice. This may be understood as the 'magical' element of the archaeological material under discussion: the deliberate and careful placement of objects in a certain order and/or manner (perhaps accompanied by ancillary actions) in order to make something happen – to control the outcome of the ritual. Although in the past, magic and ritual have been separated in anthropological and archaeological thought (Bell 1997, 46), in a Bronze Age European context magical and ritual practice cannot be archaeologically perceived as distinct. They are both modes of 'knowing and producing' and of 'relating to things in the world' which engage with 'materiality to negotiate the human experience of transcendent powers and supernatural beings' (Nakamura 2004, 11; see also Budd and Taylor 1995).

There are many examples of magical actions and activities from Irish mythology which

indicate that such supernatural processes may not have been considered as divorced from reason and rationality in early Ireland as they are in current post-modern thought. Ross provides two examples from Irish mythology which have strong magical connotations:

When she was there at night she saw a bird on the skylight coming towards her. He left his bird-dress on the floor of the house and went to her and seized her and said to her 'They are coming to you from the king, to destroy your house and to bring you to him by force, and you will be pregnant by me and you will bear a son, and that boy shall not slay birds and Conaire will be his name'. (Ross 1967, 262, after Knott 1936)

Mog Ruith's skin of the hornless, dun-coloured bull was brought to him, then and his speckled bird-dress with its winged flying and his druidic gear besides. And he rose up, in company with the fire, into the air and the heavens ... (Ross 1967, 263, after Sjoestedt 1926)

Dalton recounts a different manifestation of 'magic' in Irish folklore/myth. In *The Adventures of Art son of Conn* a 'wicked enchantress' by the name of Becuna was married to the king of Ireland, Conn Cetcathach. The fertility of Ireland was tied to the suitability of its leader and thus: 'As a result of her depravity there was a failure of crops and famine. The druids proposed to remedy this by a human sacrifice, the victim being a young man named Segda' (Dalton 1974, 344). To re-establish the natural balance between fertile land and good leadership, Segda's 'blood is to be allowed to sink into the ground. By sympathetic magic, the moistening of the soil brings rain and revives the crops. At the same time, considered as religion rather than magic, this is the correct rite for an offering to an earth-deity' (Dalton 1974, 344). Thus, again, even in mythological accounts the distinctions between religion, magic, and rite/ritual are blurred, but the action taken and the socio-cultural implications can be identified and analysed.

Ritual, practice, or ritual practice?

Much of the study of past ritual is couched under the heading 'archaeology of religion'; however, it is not necessary to comprehend the religious structure of Bronze Age Ireland to archaeologically identify the enactment of ritual. 'There is a widespread archaeological understanding that ritual is a form of human action that leaves material traces, whereas religion is a more abstract symbolic system consisting of beliefs, myths, and doctrines' (Fogelin 2007, 56). Although the terms are often conflated, religion may be understood as a system of which ritual practice is a component. The archaeological identification of ritual practice is thus distinct from a search for religion (cf. Klass 1995; Aldenderfer 2011).

In archaeological discourse ritual is, and has been, described as an irrational, symbolic,

and/or non-functional action, as the rationale behind its enactment may not be clear to the investigator. However, as Brück has stated:

Contrary to the expectation that ritual and non-ritual activities are mutually exclusive and should thus be easily distinguishable, it has in fact proved impossible to propose watertight lists of criteria for the identification of ritual in the archaeological record. (1999, 316)

Like the use of categorical terms to describe patterns of deposition in the archaeological record, the use of the term 'ritual' facilitates the assessment of past modes of behaving which, while possibly not appearing 'logical' or 'rational' to the modern investigator, were repetitive and consistent, and thus of consequence to those who enacted them (for a discussion of identifying ritual in archaeological contexts see Fogelin 2007, 59–61).

Ritual actions attempt to achieve an abstract purpose outside of those conducting the ritual; in most instances these actions involve some type of implicit or explicit communication with 'otherworldly' entities (i.e. ancestors, deities, spirits, etc.). Ritual is a complex concept which is a pervasive element of all socio-cultural systems. It is therefore impossible to provide a strict framework of what ritual is and does which could be applied to all cultures across time and space. In relation to the Irish Bronze Age, ritual is here understood as: the expression of abstract thought and mental processes; a means of communicating implicit/embedded as well as explicit/overt meaning to an audience (physical or abstract); a contextualised physical/experiential practice which can only be understood by framing the actions of past actors; one aspect of an integrated social system/structure; a way of doing things; and a process which can be reproduced by any number of actors executing discrete actions (Leonard 2014).

Ritual is a social construct and thus must be considered within its wider context. This can be achieved archaeologically by exploring how ritual practices may have been physically performed and what possible socio-cultural motivations may have been behind their enactment. As Bradley has stated:

Once it is accepted that ritual is a kind of performance – a performance which is defined by its own conventions – it becomes easier to understand how it can occur in so many settings and why it may be attached to so many concerns. (2003, 12)

In this way, past ritual actions may be viewed 'largely in terms of pragmatic choice and decision making, and/or active calculating and strategizing', with the focus therefore on the rationality and activeness of actors (Ortner 1984, 150).

A focus on the physical and performative element of ritual practice also highlights that understanding the meaning behind an action is not necessary to perform it satisfactorily (or to interpret it archaeologically): the important factor is the embodied experience of action (Lee 2005). Approaching ritual from the perspective of its physical

practice thus emphasises the experiential aspects of ritual as opposed to the underlying meaning, and allows a concentration on ritual actions and how humans perform them: ‘It is always a person that performs the ritual act and it is the performance of the actor that establishes the ritual’ (Habbe 2006, 93). To contextualise the practice of carefully arranging objects during the depositional act it is sufficient to comprehend that in the Bronze Age similar types of rituals were consistently enacted in similar locations across the island of Ireland, indicating that there was some shared understanding of the way that certain rituals should be conducted and what would be achieved by conducting them properly (Leonard 2014).

Knowledgeable intent

The careful arrangement of deposits implies the application of specialist knowledge to the ritual practice in terms of knowing what items to deposit, how they were to be arranged, and where to deposit them (in order to achieve the desired intention). For instance, this can be perceived in the Dowris Phase carefully arranged deposit from Blackhills, Co. Laois, where a Class 4 sword, a plain leaf-shaped spearhead, and a looped socketed axehead were found below the surface of a garden, neatly laid out side-by-side in a NE–SW orientation (Eogan 1983, 98–99).

Selecting objects for deposition, and working out combinations and arrangements of material, would have required learned and judgemental understanding of the symbolic order of things, of the relationship between different material categories, and knowledge of the identity and biography of particular artefacts and materials. [...] Telling of the agency of things, these pre-depositional identities and biographies must have affected how they were deposited, with what degree of formality, and by whom. Deposition as a practice therefore required an appreciation of the ontological status of things and their relationship to particular kinds of people. (Pollard 2001, 322)

Becker has asserted that, while often interpreted as non-utilitarian (*i.e.* ritual), ‘finds can also be arranged for purely practical reasons’ (2006, 19; *cf.* Geißlinger 1984), but she has also stated that ‘[c]ontextual, compositional, and conditional characteristics can reveal meaningful patterns and also potentially provide information about the rationale behind the formation of the record’ (Becker 2013, 3–4). It is here suggested that the ‘conditional characteristics’ of carefully arranged deposits highlights a heightened degree of intent in these instances of deposition. The precise arrangement of these objects indicates communication of this intent to an ‘other’ through the execution of the practice.

What underlies many studies of deliberate deposition is the concept of embedded meaning: the idea that objects (and fragments of objects) carry with them messages,

significances, and the signs of deliberately taken actions, all of which are culturally constituted and therefore only fully decipherable within the relevant culture/community/group. The choice of which objects to deposit together (as opposed to single object depositions) may also have been a significant factor in the message(s) communicated through the deposition, a concept which may in turn facilitate interpretation of deposition in general (see Pollard 2001, 316). It is clear that choices were made by the depositors when objects were deposited together as a unit or deposited in a particular manner in relation to each other, as can be seen in structured deposits generally; choices which were perhaps guided by knowledge held by the ritual practitioners.

At the most basic level, the objects included in carefully arranged deposits may be understood as symbolically associated, as they were deliberately deposited as a group. This can be seen in the encircling (by a stout copper wire) of two broad ribbed bracelets, two hair-rings, and a composite neck-ring of leather and gold-wire in the deposit from Derrinboy, Co. Offaly (Eogan 1983, 42–43; Waddell 1998, 198). This hoard is composed of gold ornaments, objects which are linked through their overt display of status and perhaps also embedded meaning when they were worn, and as they were possibly worn as a group this could indicate that their object biographies were linked. The controlled nature of the carefully arranged depositions is thus suggestive of non-verbal communication embedded/expressed not only in the deposited materials themselves but also through the way they are arranged in relation to each other.

As Becker (2006; 2013) has suggested, the decision of where to deposit is not random but is a deliberate choice. The locations at which objects were carefully deposited were of significance to the depositors in terms of the proper enactment of the deposition and thus the successful communication of the depositional intent. For instance the Tamlaght Hoard was deposited on the interface between wet and dry ground within the ritually charged landscape of the Navan Complex. The cultural/ritual knowledge that would have been associated with highly visible ritual locations can be contrasted with the knowledge associated with ‘invisible’ ritual locations:

Knowledge on where and how to deposit items in unbounded marshes may even have been an authoritative resource, defining insiders from outsiders, at odds with the over-all visible ordering displayed by barrows. (Fontijn 2007, 81)

Fontijn is suggesting that some categories of Bronze Age ritual knowledge were restrictive; in this context such an interpretation might be influenced by the frequency of the recovery of metalwork from wetlands, a category of material culture often associated with elites.

Knowledge associated with the environment and landscape would have been an integral component of Bronze Age lifeways. Detailed and almost instinctual knowledge

of the environment has been observed historically and ethnographically across the globe, in both hunter-gatherer and farming communities. The maintenance of taboos associated with particular locations in the landscape through myth and folklore, for instance the fairy stories associated with some Irish archaeological features (which in many cases ensured their survival), is also evidence of the strength of collective memory as connected to landscape use. It thus does not seem very unusual that in prehistory an unmarked location in a natural landscape could be remembered over generations as a location where ritual depositions were conducted. In other words, it may be quite possible for unmarked locations in the landscape to be remembered/known as special/taboo long after they go out of use as locations for ritual practice, but this is only possible if the knowledge of such locations is communal and not restricted.

A deposition which takes place at a commonly used fording point would undoubtedly have very different socio-cultural connotations (and repercussions) than one which takes place within an isolated area of wetland. By moving out of a zone of higher activity to a more isolated location the audience may shift from a physical one composed of members of the wider community to other ritual participants, or perhaps only an 'otherworldly' observer. In the former the execution of the ritual deposition is observed by many and thus has an immediate social effect on the status, identity, or social narrative associated with the depositor. The composition of the audience is, as a result, a significant factor in the purpose and intent communicated through the depositional practice. The communicative potential of ritual deposition is therefore highly useful for better understanding the Bronze Age socio-cultural milieu. The interaction that takes place between the depositor and the audience may be highly charged, as would very likely have been the case with the deposition of 'valuable' objects and human bone.

With depositions conducted at locations removed from the core zone of everyday activity, the social implications are altered, as the wider community/group may have known that the deposition took place, but were not witnesses to it. That deliberate deposition was enacted at a variety of types of 'settled' and 'natural' locations in Bronze Age Ireland implies that some types of ritual practice could be performed by a spectrum of community members while others were restricted to members of the community who held social roles enabling/allowing them to participate in specialist ritual activities. There may have thus been a spectrum of ritual knowledge in Bronze Age Irish society, from the general which was known to all members of a community, to restricted knowledge known only to a few. The degree of specialist knowledge required for a deposition to take place, the identity of the depositional agent as well as the composition of the audience, and consequently of messages communicated through the ritual practice, are all of potential consequence to an interpretative analysis of carefully arranged deposits, or deliberate deposition generally.

The careful arrangement of these objects is evidence of the action of an agent, feasibly

one who held the ‘correct’ knowledge of the necessary manner in which to arrange the objects and at what locations. Specific knowledge related to the enactment of ritual practice is implicit in the longevity and consistency of all categories of ritual practice discernible in the archaeological record of Bronze Age Ireland, perhaps most so in ritual deposition where we may discern the actions of individuals. Becker has suggested typological groupings within Irish multiple object deposits, as well as patterns of object-location association, may be representative of particular social roles and/or identities (Becker 2013, 27, 31–32). For instance, in the case of the Blackhills and Tamlaght deposits there seems to be strong associations between the objects and a warrior identity, and/or social role due to the presence of weapons and, in the latter, specialist drinking equipment.

If weapons and ceremonial items are representative of different Irish Bronze Age identities as Becker suggests, then it is of significance that both types of objects are included in carefully arranged deposits, albeit not in the same ones. It seems that there are multiple levels of symbolic association and communication discernible in deliberate deposits. A spectrum of knowledge related to depositional practice is therefore evidenced by the variety of types of deposits which took place in Bronze Age Ireland, which exist within and alongside a range of repeated and consistent patterns and trends of deposition. As the messages and meanings embedded in material culture are culturally constituted, a shared cultural knowledge is required in order to ‘read’ and react appropriately to the transmission of information which takes place when encountering materiality. This is why the analysis of artefacts is effective in developing our understandings of past socio-cultural systems and the social institutions which comprise them, such as deliberate deposition in Bronze Age Ireland.

The examples outlined above highlight a degree of variety in Irish Bronze Age carefully arranged deposits. Nonetheless, such precise relative placement of objects does seem to indicate a specific ritual intention and purpose behind each individual deposit. It may thus be presumed that the knowledge of how to correctly arrange the objects to achieve the intended purpose of the ritual act was held by those performing the deposition.

[It] is the *intentionality*, the understanding that there is a purpose beyond what is achieved in the act of deposition that sets the practices observed here apart from everyday, functional processes. (Becker 2013, 19)

Discussion

This paper has demonstrated that in the archaeological record of the Irish Bronze Age there is evidence for deliberate choices made by agents regarding what to deposit, where to deposit it, and if objects needed to be deposited in a particular manner, order, or

arrangement. The character of precision and deliberate action evident in these deposits indicates a stress on controlling the manner of deposition, which implies a control over the result achieved through the proper execution of the practice. Precise arrangement further indicates the communication of a particular intention through embodied action.

A better understanding of ritual practice in Bronze Age Ireland may therefore be developed by taking into account how rituals were physically performed *as well as* what the socio-cultural motivations and ramifications of the ritual act may be. The analysis of material culture within its archaeological context is the starting point from which a more nuanced appreciation for the complexity of Bronze Age depositional practice may be developed. That deliberate deposition in Ireland becomes more common and more ostentatious from the beginning to the end of the Bronze Age is just the point of departure for further investigation. The carefully arranged ritual deposits discernible in the Irish archaeological record examined in this paper have been contrasted with other categories of ritual deposition to illustrate the distinct character, the purposeful intention, and breadth of ritual knowledge which must have lay behind these deposits. A distinct ritual intention implies specialist ritual knowledge.

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Doorways, ditches and dead dogs – excavating and recording material manifestations of practical magic amongst later prehistoric and Romano-British communities

Adrian M. Chadwick

There is no truth beyond magic. (Fowles 2004 [1966], 552).

Introduction

This paper examines materialities of magic on Iron Age and Romano-British settlement sites. I had intended to take a contextual approach to such practices within the region that has formed the focus for much of my research – the modern counties of Nottinghamshire, and South and West Yorkshire. The volume's prescriptive word limits meant that this was not possible, as most evidence derives from numerous articles in county archaeological journals and unpublished archive or assessment reports produced by commercial field units – so-called 'grey literature'. Instead, using a few select case studies, this paper explores some interfaces between archaeological theory and *praxis*, and examines the problems of excavating and recording the potential evidence for 'practical magic' on developer-funded sites in Britain.

Magic, ritual and cosmology

Magic can be summarised as a set of practices intended to predict or manipulate the weather and other natural forces, influence the behaviour of people, plants and animals, control the future, supernatural forces and spiritual beings, or to seek the assistance of the latter (Merrifield 1987, 6; Stein Frankle and Stein 2005, 136; Stevens 1996, 724). Magical acts may be protective or apotropaic, and in some cultures may be linked to divination. They can be carried out by ritual specialists, but often simply by elders or those considered to have appropriate knowledge. Like ritual, magic is intended to have practical outcomes (Barrett 1989, 115; Bell 1992, 69–72; Brück 1999a, 320–322). Such practices may be formal or informal, though often socially sanctioned and 'legitimate'.

Some magic, however, may be perceived as sorcery, and thus clandestine, anti-social and 'illegitimate'.

For some researchers magic is antithetical to religion (Durkheim 1915; Mauss 1972; Wax and Wax 1963), but for others it is part of wider beliefs including religion and ritual (Frazer 1998 [1911]; Malinowski 1948; Merrifield 1987; Stevens 1996). Magic may thus reflect a society's moral, spiritual and aesthetic beliefs and be part of the cosmology of communities – how people understand and organise their world, including implicit, often unconscious social 'structures' (Bourdieu 1977). Considering the embodied performativity and sequence of ritualised acts (Bell 2007, 280–282; Berggren and Nilsson Stutz 2010, 185; Connerton 1989, 56–60; Rappaport 1999, 24) is also key to interpreting where, when and how magical practices take place.

Mundane magic and depositional practices

Many researchers have argued that from later prehistory, ritual and magic became focused largely upon people's houses, settlements and fields (Barrett 1989; Bradley 2003; 2005; Brück 1999b; Williams 2003). Despite the existence of Iron Age and Romano-British shrines and temples, it was more prosaic locales such as ditches of enclosures and fields, storage pits and wells, and the ring gullies, doorways and post-holes of roundhouses and other buildings that were the settings of countless quotidian acts of ritualised action. Although Roman votive tablets are tangible evidence of curses, apotropaic or love magic (see Moretti this volume), ethnographic and ethnohistorical evidence suggests that many small-scale ritualised or magical acts leave little by way of physical remains (Insoll 2004; 2008); usually the only means by which archaeologists can identify and interpret social practices in the past. It is thus a considerable challenge for archaeologists to explore the materiality of magic.

One relevant strand of research has focused on the deposition of artefacts, and human and animal remains in the past, including refuse. Behavioural or processual archaeology explored the mechanics and spatial variation of these processes (Binford 1980; 1981; Hayden and Cannon 1983; Schiffer 1987), whereas symbolic and structuralist studies investigated social and cosmological influences on such practices (Hodder 1982; 1987; Moore 1986), ethnographic evidence being key to both principal approaches. First discussed in relation to British Neolithic contexts, ideas concerning the spatial patterning of refuse but also more deliberately placed and ritualised materials and artefacts went on to influence Bronze and Iron Age studies, and subsequently Romano-British archaeology (Brück 1999b; Chadwick 2004; Clarke 1997; Cunliffe 1992; Fulford 2001; Gwilt 1997; Hill 1995; 1996; Hingley 2006; Willis 1999; Woodward and Woodward 2004). It continues to be a matter of debate (Brudenell and Cooper 2008; Chadwick 2012; Garrow 2012; Tracey 2012).

Despite initial resistance to some of the theoretical ideas, particularly within commercial field units, archaeologists now regularly identify and record examples of 'structured' deposits. Sometimes this involves the use of semi-formal criteria (Chadwick 2006a; Ellis and Powell 2008), but at other times distinctions are made merely because deposits seem unusual or 'odd', without necessarily analysing the spatial and chronological distribution of all excavated material. Whilst trying to recognise and interpret such practices is laudable, this work has been somewhat subjective, and perpetuates an unhelpful dichotomy between 'ritual' and 'everyday' behaviour, despite suggestions that this division is historically and culturally contingent (Brück 1999a; Chadwick 2012). Even where semi-formal contextual criteria have been created to identify 'placed' or 'structured' deposits, more detailed post-excavation analyses may reveal that apparently unusual deposits were not in fact that exceptional (Brudenell and Cooper 2008; Garrow 2012).

The situation was undoubtedly complex. Much material excavated from Iron Age and Roman period sites probably was rubbish, though in some instances there seems to have been pattern to its discard, as in many human societies. Refuse may retain a variety of social associations, perhaps representing a psychological 'underneath' connecting people and memories to their past (Scanlan 2005, 140), whilst particular locales appear to have been preferred for the disposal of refuse, including enclosure entrances and field ditch terminals. There are purely quotidian explanations for many acts – features close to regular daily movements of people might merely have seen casual, opportunistic dumping, yet enclosure entrances, roundhouse ring gully and ditch terminals were sometimes marked out by more unusual groups of objects or materials. More symbolic connotations are implied by such deposits, yet this material often cannot be easily separated from everyday discard. This was mutable matter, changing in meaning and use/disuse according to context. There also appears to have been great variability in the quantity, proportions and condition of different materials (*q.v.* Brudenell and Cooper 2008; Garrow 2012).

Nevertheless, the concept of 'placed' or 'structured' deposition continues to be influential within Iron Age and Romano-British studies. Again drawing on ethnographic data, several authors have highlighted how metalwork production during later prehistory and the Roman period may have been surrounded with proscribed rites and magical practices (Aldhouse-Green 2002; Budd and Taylor 1995; Giles 2007; Hingley 1997; 2006). Even prosaic iron objects may have retained such associations, which in certain contexts could be actively drawn upon in a more symbolic manner (but see Sharples 2010, 138 for a sceptical view).

There is comparatively little evidence for magical rites during actual copper or iron smelting and smithing in these periods, although the treatment of moulds, crucibles and slag may reflect such concerns, as at Silchester and Gussage All Saints (Fulford

and Timby 2000; Wainwright 1979). Deposits associated with well-preserved Iron Age buildings at Mine Howe in Orkney and Culduthel Farm near Inverness may be exceptions (Gibson forthcoming; Murray 2007), indicative of more formalised practices associated with metal working. The limited evidence from Nottinghamshire and South and West Yorkshire is outlined elsewhere (Chadwick 2004; 2009; 2010). The treatment afforded brooches, terret rings, linch pins, iron currency bars and iron tools and weapons prior to and during deposition also suggests that in certain circumstances, these objects possessed more than economic or utilitarian importance. The smooth shiny surface of polished metal and the visual appearance, tactile characteristics and social associations of decorative materials such as enamel, coral, glass, amber and shale may also have been highly significant, lending them magical properties on ritualised occasions (*q.v.* Garrow and Gosden 2012; Giles 2008; 2012). Weapons, tools and mirrors could be powerful, even dangerous objects.

The deposition of animal remains during the Iron Age and Romano-British periods has also been investigated (Bendrey *et al.* 2010; Black 1983; Grant 1991; Groot 2009; Hill 1995; 1996; Merrifield 1987; Serjeantson and Morris 2011; Smith 2005; Wilson 1992; 1999), with a particular focus on Associated Bone Groups or ABGs – articulated or semi-articulated parts of animals. Great care has to be taken in considering taphonomic processes on past human settlements, especially the many post-depositional factors that may influence the preservation and distribution of bone (Broderick 2012; Morris 2008; 2011). Selective or structured deposition of animal remains need not imply ritual, but could be a consequence of butchery and cultural practices. Although the majority of animal bone and ABGs may have been deposited as butchered waste and domestic refuse, in certain circumstances animals and their remains may have been invested with ritual and/or magical significance.

Wells and waterholes

The depositional processes in Romano-British wells and waterholes, deep pits or shafts have been explored by several detailed taphonomic studies (Ayton 2011; Berg 1990; Cool and Richardson 2013; Millett and Taylor 2006; Roskams *et al.* 2013), and regional evidence is again presented elsewhere (Chadwick 2009; 2010; in prep.). Remains of wooden buckets and ceramic jars probably related to drawing water, but after disuse, many wells were also used to dump domestic refuse, butchery waste and building rubble. Such deep features inevitably act as ‘traps’ for stray artefacts on the surface or for small animals. There were also more unusual deposits, however, including human remains, animal remains (particularly dogs and the heads/skulls of cattle, sheep and horses), whole or near complete ceramic and metal vessels, leather shoes, beehive and flat rotary stone querns, brooches and iron tools (Cool 1999; Fulford 2001; Gerrard

2009; Poulton and Scott 1993; van Driel-Murray 1999; Woodward and Woodward 2004). The presence of human and animal remains would have been incompatible with the use of wells or waterholes for drinking water.

Some wells, waterholes and shafts seem to have become a focus for more intentional deposition of certain objects and materials, perhaps 'closure' events once such features or settlements were abandoned, magical rites for apotropaic purposes, or when people were about to embark on journeys (van Driel-Murray 1999). Alternatively, these were rites of chthonic closure, acts of termination and forgetting (Chadwick 2009; in prep.). Many wells thus feature complex mixes of prosaic and potentially more ritualised deposits, and such sequences may be hard to disentangle.

At Hoveringham Quarry, Gonalston in Nottinghamshire, a large waterhole or pond produced a substantial assemblage of 2nd century AD pottery including fine wares and samian (Elliott and Knight 1996; Knight and Elliott 2008, 174–176). Iron and copper-alloy objects, lathe-turned and carved wooden objects, textile fragments, leather shoes and quernstones were also recovered. A well at Bunny contained substantially complete pottery vessels, some used for drawing water, but also shallow dishes (Alvey 1967). Quern fragments and remains of horses, deer and pigs were also recovered, and 66 lower jaws and skulls from sheep or goats. At Shiptonthorpe in East Yorkshire, a waterhole contained partially articulated animal remains and skulls, quern fragments, much decorated samian, leather shoes, metal objects, and evidence for holly and mistletoe (Millett and Taylor 2006, 56–57, 314–316). Remains of wooden writing tablets recovered might originally have had votive dedications (*q.v.* Derks 1995). After the waterhole was backfilled it formed a focus for human and animal burials. The 'evergreen' species of holly and mistletoe might also have had special significance (*q.v.* Scaife 1986, 132).

Recent re-assessment of an earlier salvage excavation at Rothwell Haigh in West Yorkshire focused on a Romano-British well that contained a human skull, a wooden spade, bucket and bowls, leather shoes (possibly all belonging to women), beehive and flat quernstones, and complete ceramic vessels (Cool and Richardson 2013; Richardson 2011; van Driel-Murray 2011). Faunal remains were dominated by sheep skulls and mandibles, cattle jaws, pig bones and up to 19 dogs (Ayton 2011; Richardson 2011). At least some sheep, pigs and dogs were probably deposited as whole animals/carcasses. A well at the Dalton Parlours villa included wood and iron remains of buckets and also ceramic jars in primary fills, undoubtedly from accidental loss during use (Sumpter 1990, 236). Upper fills also contained quern stones, iron tools including a spade shoe, silver and copper alloy rings and coins, and leather scraps and shoes. Animal remains included numerous sheep and cattle skulls, horse skulls, foetal or neonatal pigs, remains of up to 31 dogs; and partial remains of three adult humans (Berg 1990). Plants included deadly nightshade, henbane, hemlock, purging flax and self-heal (Bastow and Murray 1990, 263–266).

Many plants from the Dalton Parlours well are common to disturbed or waste ground, and were thus linked to settlement abandonment (Bastow and Murray 1990). These plants are all common in herbal medicines, however, and some have ambiguous qualities – in small amounts they are effective painkillers or other remedies, but are poisonous in large quantities. The Dalton Parlours plant remains were similar to those found within shafts associated with a Roman shrine or healing centre in the Castleford *vicus*, and also inside unusual ceramic vessels from a Romano-British pit in Silchester (Bastow and Boardman 1999, 173; Cool 1999, 304–306; Fulford 2001, 206).

The dog remains frequently found in Romano-British wells might have reflected the potential role of dogs as intercessories with the gods, and also perhaps Cerberus, guardian of the underworld (Woodward and Woodward 2004, 78). In Greco-Roman rituals, shafts were links to the underworld and the dead, used for the disposal of sacrificial animal remains, vessels used for offerings and libations, and special votive objects (Merrifield 1987, 44). Some researchers have argued that similar deposits date back to the Iron Age (Ross 1968, 255–285; Wait 1985, 51–82), but this has been challenged (Webster 1997, 136–137). Placed deposits in wells might have been a post-conquest phenomenon, whereby indigenous traditions concerning water, pits and deposits were combined with ‘Roman’ chthonic rites. Hingley (2006, 238) suggested that during later prehistory iron objects were mainly placed within boundaries, but during the Romano-British period, largely in wells and deep pits.

The recovery of leather shoes from many Roman wells is intriguing, and in some instances footwear might have been used in foundation rites or rituals of termination. Footwear was also highly personal, and would have literally borne the imprint of the wearer (van Driel-Murray 2006, 244). Disposal of such items might sometimes have been material metaphors for physical travel or journeys into the afterlife. If only one half of a pair of shoes was represented, perhaps part of the wearer was staying behind in spirit. At Mill Mount in York, a ditch next to a Romano-British cemetery contained remains of up to nine hobnailed boots, and disarticulated human and animal bone (Spall and Toop 2005, 17). This might indicate further shoe symbolism, linked to memories of the wearers.

Of ditches, dead dogs and doorways – two recent project case studies

Some of the problems and potential posed by such theories, the complex nature of the archaeological material, and practical difficulties in dealing with it can be illustrated with regard to two recent large-scale, open-area investigations of later Iron Age and Romano-British settlement sites that the author was involved with.

Wattle Syke, West Yorkshire

Wattle Syke is a large, agglomerated Iron Age and Romano-British cropmark enclosure complex south of Wetherby in West Yorkshire, part of which was excavated by Archaeological Services West Yorkshire in 2007 during the A1 upgrading scheme. The final publication is an excellent example of a detailed multi-period excavation report (Martin *et al.* 2013), and only a brief synopsis of the archaeology is presented here.

Burnt stone was found in abundance within pits, ditches and ‘working hollows’, many very large river cobbles (Fig. 3.1) and clearly not small or fragmented ‘pot boilers’. Some of the prodigious quantities of stone may have been derived from large-scale feasting, found in conjunction with fragmented pottery, animal bone, but also disused or broken quern stones and even Roman coins. Although much of this activity probably represented dumps of refuse and midden material, the presence of some of the other items was harder to explain simply as rubbish disposal or chance loss.

One notable feature of Wattle Syke was the large number of articulated or semi-articulated animal ABGs. Details and further discussion of these have been presented



Fig. 3.1. A small, half-excavated pit at Wattle Syke near Wetherby, West Yorkshire. The large number of burnt and/or heat-shattered river cobbles is evident. (Source: © AS WYAS, used with permission)

elsewhere (Richardson 2012b). Some were Iron Age and Romano-British burials of complete cattle, sheep, goats and pigs in ditches and pits. Iron Age roundhouses and late Romano-British sunken-floored buildings had intriguing animal bone deposits in features within the buildings, or else closely focused on them. These included butchered, disarticulated sheep and goat remains in pits, but where the majority of the carcass was still present and apparently not consumed. There was a particularly high representation of female and neonatal sheep and goats. The detailed contextual evidence was used to argue that many animal burials resulted from ritualised ceremonies, perhaps to mark calendrical rites and the passing of seasons, or linked to particular feasts sealing alliances, reducing social tensions and increasing social status, celebrating marriages, or honouring and mourning the deaths of particular human individuals (Chadwick *et al.* 2013). Some animal burials and ABGs might also have represented divination sacrifices, or formalised blood-shedding/letting, even ‘blood debts’ incurred through social transgressions.

One late Roman sunken-floored structure had disarticulated remains from a partial boar skeleton in one pit or posthole, and jumbled sheep remains in an adjacent feature (Fig. 3.2). The same building also featured a pit containing the partial remains of a goat, along with many sheep and goat skulls and mandibles; and another pit with yet another partly butchered boar. Against the background distribution of animal bone, these ABGs were significant. Although the building in question could conceivably have been used for butchery, this does not explain why portions of the carcasses were apparently not consumed. Taken with the evidence from across the site (Richardson 2012b), it seems likely that some animal remains were derived from small-scale magical acts, associated with foundation deposits or household shrines.



Fig. 3.2. Two small pits or post-holes associated with a later Roman sunken-floored building at Wattle Syke, possibly on either side of a doorway. The feature on the left contains disarticulated and jumbled bones from a sheep, whilst that on the right contains disarticulated remains from a partial boar skeleton. (Source: © AS WYAS, used with permission)

At Wattle Syke there were clear associations between some human neonate burials and animal ABGs, with groups of both surrounding several roundhouses and present in some enclosure ditches (Chadwick *et al.* 2013, 171–172; Martin 2012; Richardson 2012a). The pattern of adult and neonate animals being buried together suggests a link between infant animals and humans, and ideas concerning death, fertility and renewal. It might also reflect the wish to control the bodies of some human and animal dead, especially if the deaths were regarded as unlucky or inauspicious, and in the later Romano-British human inhumations, some adults and infants (or token infant bones) were often interred together. Close spatial links between infant and animal burials have been noted elsewhere, as at Shiptonthorpe in East Yorkshire (Millett and Taylor 2006, 61).

The magnetometer survey and subsequent trial trench evaluation of the proposed road scheme route at Wattle Syke identified a large number of features, including depressions with quantities of stone in the fills, initially interpreted as shallow quarries. The inexperienced archaeological consultant working on behalf of the principal road contractor recommended routing the road through the middle of this complex enclosure group, believing that it would probably reveal relatively little archaeology, and just 3 months was allocated by him for fieldwork. Soil stripping revealed far more archaeological features than were previously anticipated, however, many not visible on the geophysical survey, along with much greater quantities of artefacts and animal bone. The ‘quarries’ proved to be late Roman sunken-floored buildings, some featuring low stone walls for supporting cob or turf walls.

Excavation took 6 months, unfortunately delaying some aspects of the road construction work. Halfway through the excavation therefore, the consultant suggested that some features be preserved *in situ*, with only 50% of structures excavated in opposing quadrants, a risible sampling strategy that would have severely compromised subsequent analysis and interpretation. Fortunately, archaeological curators and English Heritage scientific advisors helped demonstrate that adequate preservation would have taken additional resources and actually cost more, although considerable time and effort of site staff and specialists was wasted assessing the feasibility of such a scheme.

Barton Seagrave, Northamptonshire

An extensive open area at Barton Seagrave near Kettering in Northamptonshire was excavated by Northamptonshire Archaeology in August–December 2012, in advance of a large-scale housing development. There was a concentration of Middle Iron Age roundhouses, ditches and pits, with Late Iron Age and Romano-British features.

Once again, large quantities of burnt stone were encountered, along with several animal ABGs, and dumps of pottery in pits, ditches and ring gully terminals (Fig. 3.3).



Fig. 3.3. Stuart Willis of Northamptonshire Archaeology excavating a concentration of Romano-British pottery in the terminal of a field system ditch at Barton Seagrave, near Kettering, Northamptonshire. He has already recorded and removed part of what appeared to have been a large, dumped deposit of ceramics. (Source: A. M. Chadwick)

Most of the *c.* 300 pits excavated contained unexceptional quantities of broken pottery and animal bone, much of it probably refuse. But amongst these apparently prosaic features and deposits was a pit with co-mingled human and horse bones (Fig. 3.4), and another containing three complete *in situ* pots. Next to a possible Iron Age kiln containing large fragments of a fired clay and wattle dome-like structure,



Fig. 3.4. Co-mingled and/or arranged human and horse bones from a pit at Barton Seagrave. (Source: A. M. Chadwick)

another pit had at least five complete or near complete pots placed against its base and sides, arranged as whole but flattened and fragmented vessels (Fig. 3.5). It was usually impossible to tell on the surface from the size and shape of the pits whether they would be deep or shallow, or what quantities and distributions of material they contained. At Barton Seagrave there were also three Romano-British wells, carefully machine excavated and recorded in stepped box sections to groundwater depth.



Fig. 3.5. Iron Age ceramic vessels flattened then carefully arranged around the base and sides of a pit at Barton Seagrave. (Source: A. M. Chadwick)

One well only produced a few sherds of Romano-British pottery, but two contained broken quern stones deposited above the well shafts (Fig. 3.6), and one featured near-complete and partly articulated dog remains. Only future analysis will be able to assess these patterns of deposition, and apparent patterning or discrepancies in them.

At Barton Seagrave, the fieldwork contract was awarded on the basis of a fixed

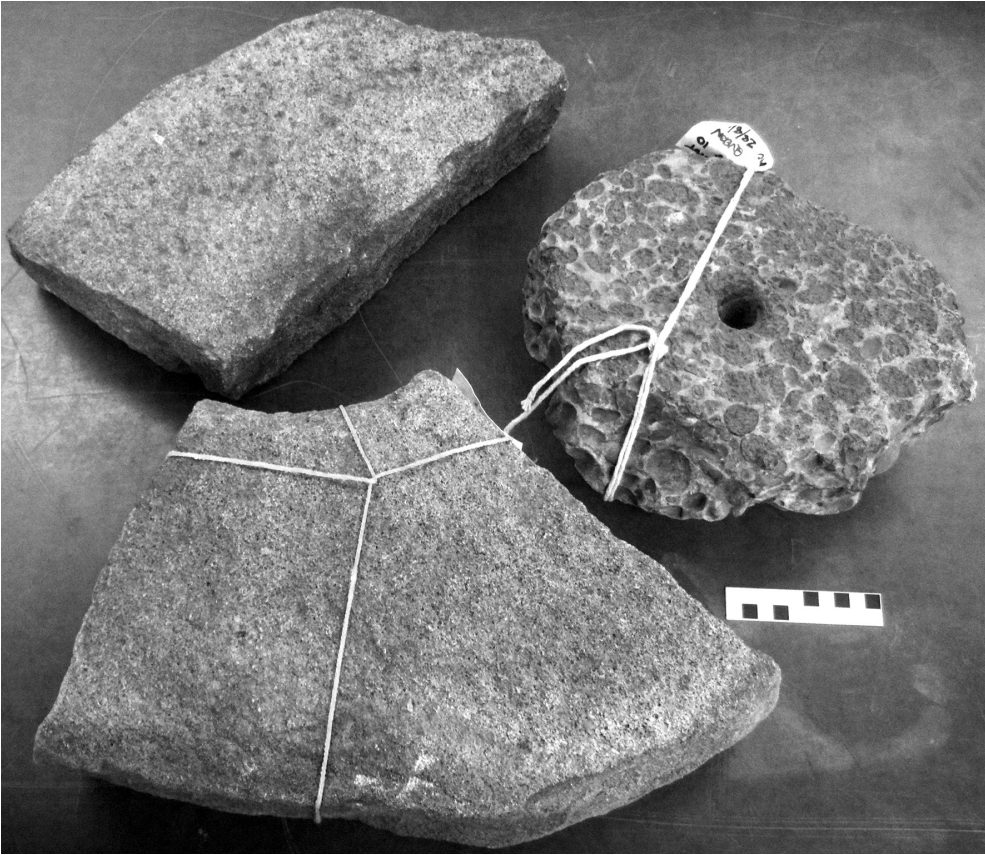


Fig. 3.6. Just some of the many Romano-British quern fragments recovered from the excavated wells at Barton Seagrave. (Source: A. M. Chadwick)

price tender, submitted in part on the results of geophysical survey, and a limited trial trench evaluation undertaken by an archaeological consultancy. There was a real concern that such a significant project ‘on the doorstep’ would be lost to larger organisations based elsewhere, able to undercut on price. In the event, far more archaeology than anticipated was revealed, and the project overran significantly, with concomitant serious financial implications. This placed extreme pressure on site staff, although careful monitoring and review of excavation and sampling strategies by the curatorial service ensured that minimum standards were met. Nevertheless, it will be interesting to see if post-excavation analysis and publication is adequately funded, and able to exploit the full potential of this settlement and its material assemblages.

Burnt stone and feasting

The stones in later Neolithic and Bronze Age burnt mounds in Britain and Ireland were used in sweat lodges, and/or for boiling meat in troughs (cf. Barfield and Hodder 1987; Buckley 1990; Eogan 2007; Ó Drisceoil 1988; Roycroft 2006). There is little evidence for such specific practices and features on later Iron Age and Romano-British sites in England, however, and though burnt and heat-affected stone is commonly found, it is rarely quantified or explicitly discussed. At Wattle Syke, great quantities of small pebbles through to large river cobbles were found, all brought several hundred metres from the nearest watercourse. Just one 4 m wide section dug across an enclosure ditch produced nearly 115 kg of burnt stone from a series of small dumps, perhaps originally from hand-held baskets. Burnt stone also formed part of midden deposits within backfilled ‘working hollows’ (Martin 2012). Whilst smaller so-called ‘pot boilers’ could have heated liquids in ceramic or leather vessels, many cobbles at Wattle Syke were far too big for this, and might have been instead used for pit roasting (*q.v.* Rappaport 1984) and/or for brewing beer (Pitts 2010, 6).

Many dumps of burnt stone, charcoal, pottery and animal bone encountered at Wattle Syke and Barton Seagrave appeared relatively unremarkable, derived from everyday domestic activities. Nevertheless, some burnt stone appeared to form part of more carefully placed or ‘nested’ deposits with broken pottery vessels and/or animal remains. Butchered bone, broken pottery and burnt stone might have been considered refuse in most contexts throughout most of the year, but some remnants associated with a particular feast or set of rituals, or objects that had belonged to certain individuals, might have had to have been disposed of in particular places within settlements, and in more socially controlled ways. This suggests that the disposal of such feasting remnants were important mnemonic acts (Chadwick 2012, 301; Chadwick *et al.* 2013, 181).

Brooches

Isolated finds of brooches on excavations or by metal detectorists are usually regarded as accidental losses, whilst broken and/or worn brooches are seen as having been thrown away once their usefulness had ended. Such automatic assumptions should be questioned. In some regions, brooch finds reported through museums and the Portable Antiquities Scheme have been located on the edges of, or even *away* from, settlement foci known from cropmarks and other evidence (Dearne and Parsons 1997; Farley 2008; forthcoming; Lloyd Morgan 2001; O’Connor 2001). The distributions of Late Iron Age and Romano-British zoomorphic brooches in particular appear to have been

closely linked to temple or shrine sites, and/or more formalised deposits (Brindle 2013; Haselgrove 1997; Hawkes and Jacobsthal 1945).

Brooches would have played important roles in projecting aspects of people's identities, perhaps reflecting changing social ideas of the body, appearance, personhood and community from the later Iron Age through into the Romano-British period (Farley 2012; Hill 1997; Hunter 2007; Jundi and Hill 1998; Taylor 2013). Many brooches were deeply personal items, worn and warmed close to the body, touched and scuffed by hands and clothing (Giles 2012, 140). Some would have been heirloom objects handed down through families and lineages, acquiring biographies and a patina of age, and evoking many memories. Apparently old or broken examples may thus still have been valued, and it is also possible that some breakage was deliberate. During the Romano-British period, some brooches such as 'horse and rider' examples may have been akin to medieval pilgrim badges, associated with visits to particular temple and shrine sites, and/or with certain deities. It is therefore likely that some brooches at least were apotropaic or propitiatory offerings, but it is by no means clear whether these were personal or communal practices – or both.

Evidence outside 'formal' ritual contexts also indicates that some individual brooches were perhaps invested with religious or magical significance. At Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Gloucestershire, over 40 Iron Age and Romano-British copper alloy and iron brooches were recovered from shallow gullies and ditches of enclosures associated with seasonal summer livestock grazing alongside the River Thames (Jennings *et al.* 2004). That so many brooches were lost is unusual, even over decades or centuries, as some would have remained visible on the bases of features (Chadwick 2006b, 510). Yet attempting to classify these as either 'votive' deposits or accidental losses would be extremely difficult. At Wattle Syke, one small pit lined with burnt cobbles contained cremated remains of a pig and a sheep or goat, on top of which was placed an unburnt copper-alloy Romano-British brooch, a rare form that was silvered and also featured a prominent red bead (Cool 2012, 194). These colours and its unusual nature would have highlighted the importance of the deposit. Here were intriguing intersections between humanity and animality, life and death, materiality and magic.

Material magic

How explicit such understandings were even to those who carried out such deposition is open to question. Many depositional practices may have been subconscious, undertaken because this had always been the 'right' way in which to do things. Though to some extent ritualised, this was probably not magic. Through processes of ritualisation (Bell 1992), however, certain contexts such as ditch terminals, enclosure entrances and

building doorways, and certain materials, might have taken on a more numinous charge at times. What was mundane became magical.

The practices undertaken at such locales were vital to activities such as ploughing, sowing and harvesting, spring births or autumn culls of animals; or associated with the construction of new buildings. They were regular acts, many undertaken on a seasonal basis (*q.v.* Giles and Parker Pearson 1999). Larger-scale communal practices probably marked calendrical events such as full moons, midwinter or midsummer, and may have included feasts. Others were apotropaic and designed to protect people, animals and crops from disease, bad weather, curses, evil spirits or the worst whims of the gods. These may have been very small-scale magical rites, performed by individuals or households. Ethnographic and ethnohistoric studies have recorded numerous similar magical acts designed to safeguard people, livestock and crops, houses, barns and byres – such practices persisted in Western Europe until comparatively recently (Chadwick 2012; Insoll 2004; Merrifield 1987). They were not formalised ritual practices, but smaller-scale, worldly and mundane magical acts that emerged out of the intimate, interlinked lives and biographies of people, places, animals and different materials. Magic resided in these relational meshworks.

Theoretical and methodological implications

Archaeologists thus still often cannot be sure if the objects and materials that we excavate were invested with any particular explicit meaning by the people who deposited them. Even if we can identify apparently intentional patterning on settlement sites, this by itself need not imply overtly ritualised behaviour, especially as it seems likely that they were unspoken social conventions governing deposition during the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Prosaic practices and more arcane rites may have both left ostensibly identical material ‘signatures’. In addition, these acts were unlikely to have comprised rigidly proscribed rules, but instead were a ‘suite or palette of conventions’ (Chadwick 2012, 301), a ‘shared lexicon’ reproduced but also transformed by each community (Giles 2000, 153). This was a contingent poetics of practice predicated upon tradition, but which could be knowingly and strategically altered depending on social context.

Charcoal and burnt stone in a ditch or pit was normally derived from domestic refuse, for example, but in some instances may have represented relatively unimportant residues of much more significant magical acts. Conversely, apparently insignificant or familiar artefacts or materials and everyday contexts could perhaps have been imbued with ritual or magical significance on occasion. An Iron Age or Roman coin found in a ditch terminal might represent chance loss, as someone fumbled in a tunic or a bag; but could also have been a deliberate yet very small-scale offering. It is thus extremely difficult to define ‘structured’ deposits, and to distinguish these analytically and ontologically from

‘everyday’ refuse (Chadwick 2012; Garrow 2012). Indeed, as has been recognised for some time, such clear-cut divisions are theoretically and methodologically flawed (Brück 1999a). Identifying *most* magical practices in the past with any confidence is probably impossible, and this paper does not posit any simple means by which this problem can be addressed.

This does not mean that archaeologists should abandon attempts to trace such practices, as there are a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches worth pursuing. Rather than trying to understand the meaning of past actions and deposits, we need to investigate strategies of ritualisation – the embodied actions and locations of performative practices through which understandings were brought into being (Barrett 1991, 2; Berggren and Nilsson Stutz 2010, 185–186, 191). We should also investigate the materialities and biographies of artefacts and human and animal remains (Jones 2001; Morris 2008; Pollard 2001; 2008). Based on such contextual ‘thick description’, it may then prove possible through archaeologies of inference (Adams 1991) to investigate the existence of magical acts. Again, this cannot determine how these materials were experienced in the past. It will allow for a more self-critical approach, however, where the notion of ‘mundane magic’ should mean that rigid distinctions between ‘placed’ and prosaic deposits, informal and formalised acts, and magical rites and rituals will become blurred.

This can be partly achieved through much more rigorous and systematic excavation and sampling, accompanied by spatial and statistical analyses, and sophisticated combinations of taphonomic and interpretative theoretical ideas. Repeated patterns and associations can then be identified, as well as exceptions and discrepancies, long-term taphonomic processes and diachronic changes (Brudenell and Cooper 2008; Chadwick 2009; Farley 2012; Garrow 2012). Possible placed deposits and ABGs need to be excavated and recorded in detail but whilst identifying criteria may be useful, reflexive approaches should be encouraged. Antiquarian notions of ‘small’ or ‘special’ finds are especially problematic, and should be replaced with contextual recording (Collis 2001, 84–86; Cumberpatch and Dunkley 1996, 7). There is also a compelling case for a nationwide programme of archaeological metal detector surveys of Scheduled sites and other settlements known from cropmarks or geophysical surveys, in order to systematically record and excavate under controlled conditions material that might otherwise disappear with the depredations of metal detectorists and night hawkers (Chadwick 2009, 93–94), safeguarding these items once and for all.

During post-excavation, adequate time and resources must be allocated for post-excavation specialists, contextual, spatial and statistical analyses, and inter-project studies. This rarely happens at present, and much data gathered on-site is of poor quality or even useless for such detailed investigations (Blinkhorn and Cumberpatch 1997; Cumberpatch 2000; Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 2001; Cumberpatch and Roberts

2012). The exact locations of querns, brooches, whole or substantially complete pottery vessels, human and animal burials and ABGs need to be routinely illustrated within reports; along with the locations of excavated interventions and spatial and volumetric distributions (Chadwick 2009; Robbins 2000). Burnt stone should also be quantified and compared with pottery and animal bone deposition. The results of these analyses must be routinely incorporated within published monographs, journal articles and unpublished client and assessment reports, to allow other researchers to interrogate and reassess the data. Assessment reports and so-called 'popular' publications should not become a substitute for full academic presentation of specialist quantifications, fabric types, typologies and intra- and inter-site analyses.

Wide-ranging synthetic research studies that examine spatial and chronological distributions on Iron Age and Romano-British settlement sites are also required, in order to try and identify contextual, spatial and temporal patterns and differences. There have been site-specific investigations of social space and chronological variations of deposition in and around Iron Age and Romano-British rural settlements (Evans 2001; Gwilt 1997; Martin 2007; Millett 2007; Mudd 1999; Robbins 2000; Taylor 1997; 2001; Willis 1997; 1999; Woodward 2002; Woodward and Hughes 2007), but this now needs to be undertaken on a regional and national basis. The hundreds of published and unpublished excavation archives could form the focus of an excellent collaborative, multi-disciplinary and inter-departmental research project.

Practical problems and ethical concerns

Trying to identify spatial, contextual and temporal patterns of deposition is time consuming, and can add significant additional expense to post-excavation work. One major factor hindering the development of such analyses is the current system of commercial field practice in Britain, carried out in an ever more cut-throat environment. One of the largest commercial field units in Britain routinely places extremely low 'loss-leading' tenders, a ploy designed to win initial contracts and guarantee follow-on work as a result. Many smaller organisations simply cannot compete. Individual project managers may also undercut other field units in order to obtain work. Inevitably, this reduces standards over time, and projects are increasingly under-funded and under-resourced. Most tenders are awarded by clients or consultants, who with rare exceptions evince little interest in innovative sampling strategies and research questions. Indeed, site sampling and post-excavation analyses are often where archaeological consultants and managers try to reduce budgets, in order to minimise expense to their clients (Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 2001; Fenton-Thomas 2006). Such pressures and compromises are increasing on commercial projects, and it is counter-productive to systematic, contextual approaches.

Archaeological curators setting briefs and monitoring fieldwork must insist on more rigorous on-site sampling and post-excavation analyses, and should resist the onerous demands of consultants and their clients. Previously ineffectual organisations such as the Institute for Archaeologists must cease kow-towing to developers, consultants and the imperatives of neo-liberal capitalism, and should support and promote archaeology as an academically rigorous discipline, accountable to wider ethical, social and intellectual concerns (*q.v.* Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 2001; Hamilakis 2007; Tarlow and Pluciennik 2007). Ultimately, developer-funded archaeology in Britain needs to be reformed, restructured and better regulated. Tenders should be awarded not on cost but on the quality of project designs, and an organisation's record of fieldwork and publication. General development taxes proportional to developers' profits or turnovers should fund all commercial archaeological work undertaken through the planning process, along with the establishment of accessible regional finds and archive centres.

All this seems most unlikely to happen in the current economic and political climate in Britain, with museums, local authority curatorial archaeology services and advisory posts in archaeology and building conservation all devastated by budget cuts (*e.g.* Rescue 2013), and where recent legislation now includes an explicit presumption *in favour* of development (DCLG 2012). If the positive changes outlined above could be brought about, however, that really would be magic.

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Domestic magic and the walking dead in medieval England: A diachronic approach

Stephen Gordon

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which the medieval household was protected against supernatural agents, specifically the walking dead ('revenants'). The fear that the dead could rise and wreak havoc on the living was by no means a minority concern in the High and Late Middle Ages (Caciola 1996). Documentary sources, such as William of Newburgh's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (c. 1198), provide tangible evidence for the belief in corporeal ghosts. William's statement 'were I to write down all the instances of this kind which I have ascertained to have befallen in our times, the undertaking would be beyond measure laborious and troublesome' is certainly suggestive of the local *mentalité* concerning the walking dead (Book V, chapter 24 [hereafter written as V.24]). Archaeological studies into 'bad' death and the fear of the corpse have mostly focused on apotropaic strategies that occurred at the grave-site, such as staking, the weighting of the body, cremation, and decapitation (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005; Murphy 2008; Reynolds 2009; Gordon 2014). However, it is important to note that a great many revenant encounters occurred at home or in the village streets. The aim of this chapter, then, is to show that techniques for allaying the dead can also be discerned in *domestic* contexts, and that apotropaic devices were an integral (though often overlooked) component of the medieval house. Evidence for household protection in this period is often obscured by the scarcity of data from deserted medieval villages. The source material is, at first glance, limited. However, adhering to the methodological standpoint that effective strategies could circulate in the local worldview until such time habitual changes made the practice impossible, I will explore whether Early Modern devices, such as witch-posts and threshold deposits, can be used to identify similar patterns of protection in the High and Late Middle Ages. An investigation into the archaeology of domestic magic can yield much information about how eschatological concerns and social traumas – made manifest in the form of the revenant – affected the rhythms of daily life in this period.

The first part of this investigation will chart some of the more overt documentary examples of the infiltration of the household by the walking dead, with a specific focus

on the *Chronicle of Lanercost* (c. 1340s), and the collection of ghost stories transcribed in c. 1400 by an anonymous monk from Byland Abbey (Maxwell 1913; Grant 1924). Following a brief outline of my methodology and the benefits of conducting interdisciplinary, diachronic research, the chapter will culminate in a review of the practices that, I contend, belong to the same cultural ‘text’ – the same pool of habits and beliefs – as the written sources and later archaeological evidence (Stock 1990). Hitherto ambiguous residues from Nevern Castle (Pembrokeshire) and the villages of West Hartburn (Northumberland), Gombledon (Wiltshire), Upton (Gloucestershire), and Thuxton (Norfolk) will be re-analysed using this wider contextual information. Excavation reports from deserted medieval villages provide much more abundant datasets than those from civic sites and, as such, this paper will necessarily operate as an example-led survey of rural case studies (Beresford and Hurst 1971). An examination of the use of protective magic in urban contexts is beyond the remit of the current investigation. I will conclude by discussing how the placement of apotropaic devices in the liminal (‘between’) space of the household was a long-lived habitual response to the threat of malign, supernatural agents, and that the base ‘rhetoric’ for such practices finds expression in the more archaeologically attestable evidence from the 16th and 17th centuries.

Revenants and the household: the documentary evidence

Evidence for the belief in the walking dead is spread thinly across the extant documentary sources. Although authorial intention necessarily effects how and why the tales of revenant activity were transcribed, saints’ lives (*vita*), histories, confessionals and preachers’ manuals each contain references to the havoc wrought by ambulatory corpses and the strategies used to keep them under control (Caciola 1996; Watkins 2007, 185–193). The *Chronicle of Lanercost* is one of the most evocative sources where the danger posed to the architecture of the household is concerned. The *Chronicle* – an interpolation of a Franciscan chronicle by an anonymous canon from Lanercost Priory, Cumbria – describes events that occurred in northern England and Scotland between 1201 and 1346 (Little 1916). One *exemplum* describes how, in 1296 in Paisley, west Scotland, a Benedictine monk was excommunicated on account of ‘certain acts of sacrilege committed in his own monastery.’ The monk died not long after. However, after death, his corpse took to rising from the grave, and started attacking the household of a local Knight, Sir Duncan de Insula. It was said that the revenant used to wander the streets of the village, and ‘settle on the highest parts of the dwellings and store houses’. Whenever the townsfolk tried to stab or shoot the monk’s corpse, the swords and arrows that were thrust into its body immediately turned to ashes. Equally, those who tried to physically restrain it as it roamed the streets were beaten to a bloody pulp. One evening,

when Sir Duncan was sitting with his household around the hearth, the dead monk suddenly appeared and started attacking Duncan and his family. The knight's son tried to fight off the revenant, but he was killed by the creature. As befitting the moralistic function of medieval historiography, the *exemplum* concludes with the statement that this was a just demise for someone who was rumoured to have been complicit in the monk's sins (Maxwell 1913, 118–119; Bynum 1997, 22). The interior space of the household was unable to provide protection.

The 12 Byland Abbey ghost stories, meanwhile, were transcribed on blank leaves in a 12th-century manuscript (BL Royal 15 A. XX) in the years following the death of Richard II. The manuscript contained several works of Cicero and a collection of theological tracts. The codicological placement of the stories indicates that they were not used for preaching or pedagogical purposes. The lack of any overt didacticism and the fact that the majority of the encounters occur within the vicinity of Byland suggests that the monk was recording local gossip. As the monk himself stated, '*dictur, referent aliqui*' (Schmitt 1998, 142–143). The third tale, which describes the post-mortem wanderings of a man named Robert from the village of Kilburn, North Yorkshire, paints an especially vivid picture of the domestic context of revenant encounters. According to the monk, 'Robert the younger died and was buried in a churchyard, but he had a habit of leaving his grave by night and disturbing and frightening the villagers. And the dogs of the village used to follow him and bark loudly.' One night, whilst Robert wandered through the village and attempted to gain entry to houses via windows and doorways, a group of young men decided that they needed to put an end to his unwanted visitations. They confronted the corpse in the churchyard, where, after a fierce struggle, a certain Robert Foxton pinned it to a 'kirkstile' and called for the assistance of a priest. Once conjured, the revenant confessed to having taken part in a number of 'offences'. After gaining absolution for his sins, Robert walked no more (Grant 1925, 369–370).

The 12th-century sources provide further evidence that the restless dead were compelled to return to the places they had known in life. As with the *Chronicle of Lanercost* extract, these narratives served a moralistic or critical function (Bartlett 2002, 199; Otter 1996, 103). Geoffrey of Burton's *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna* (c. 1140s) notes that the corpses of two peasants who had died in sin wandered through streets of Drakelow Burton-upon-Trent, 'bang[ing] on the walls of the houses and shouting, "Move, quickly, move! Get going! Come!"', after which the inhabitants of the targeted homes succumbed to illness and death (Bartlett 2002, 196–197). Similarly, the 'Berwick Ghost' narrative from William of Newburgh's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* describes how the eponymous corpse was 'borne hither and thither through the town's streets', corrupting the atmosphere as it went (V.23). Disease was not the only weapon in the revenant's arsenal. The *Historia* contains an account of a corpse that 'entered the bed where his [widow] was reposing; he not only terrified her on awaking, but nearly crushed

her by the insupportable weight of his body' (V.22). A similar story was reported by a young woman from Melrose who, William says, was plagued by nightly visits from her deceased paramour – a priest (V.24). Finally, Walter Map's satire on courtly life, the *De Nugis Curialium* (c. 1182), refers to a knight from Northumberland who, fearing the machinations of the devil, prevented the corpse of his recently-deceased father ('clad in a foul burial shroud') from crossing over the main threshold of his house (James 1983, 115).

These narratives reveal quite a lot of incidental details about the local conception of the walking dead (Caciola 1996, 10). Revenant belief was not restricted to a particular geographical area. Secondly, it is noticeable that domestic architecture – the hearth, the bedroom, the doorway, the rooftop – features just as prominently as the gravesite in narratives of this type. Thirdly, it is intriguing to note how, in the Byland narrative, the revenant of Robert Kilburn seems to have been prevented from crossing certain thresholds, whereas the Benedictine monk (*Lancercost*) and the Buckingham Ghost (*Historia*) were able to gain access to the house's interior. If, as William of Newburgh notes, revenant attacks 'had often befallen in England' (V.22), and if domestic buildings could be the focus of an evil agent's wrath, then it is feasible that permanent (or semi-permanent) amuletic devices were incorporated into the architecture of the house itself. However, the dearth of material evidence, and the propensity to record anomalous objects as infill, has obscured previous attempts to define the archaeology of domestic ghost/revenant belief (Gilchrist 2008, 124). To extract meaning from the data requires an analysis of the context of the find, and an understanding of how the object was used – and *perceived* – in different social arenas. If the remains of medieval houses betray anything of the beliefs mentioned in the written texts, it is through a close reading of the material that a protective device can be distinguished from mere detritus. How, then, do we do this?

Methodology

To build upon the tenets of practice theory, I believe that the strategies used to allay malign agents in the Early Modern period (where the evidence for household protection is a lot more abundant) can provide a pattern for understanding how revenants were assuaged in the Middle Ages. The nature, or name, of the intruder may have changed, but the practice, the apotropaic response, was able to persevere until such time the witch, revenant, ghost or demon was no longer seen as an everyday, tangible threat. This is not to suggest that *exact* meanings were maintained over time, only that the incorporation of protective devices into the household was an act which, due to architectural and cognitive constraints, could generate only a limited number of practical outcomes (De Certeau 1984; Stones 2005). The deeply-held association between dangerous liminal

spaces (thresholds) and dangerous liminal agents (the supernatural entity) structured the dialogues that the social actor – the householder – shared with his or her environs (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1967). Although it is true that doctrinal changes following the Reformation (for example, the rejection of purgatory and relic culture) may have influenced the form and function of popular piety, it has been argued that the incremental nature of the 16th-century reform led to less provocative practices, such as informal, private custom, being tacitly ignored by the Church and state (Duffy, 1992; Hutton 1995, 113–114; Marshall 2003, 56). Similarly, a sermon from 1645, written during Puritanical efforts to regulate such practices, illustrates the difficulty of imposing new social structures onto traditional modes of living, with the declaration that ‘it is indeed a very hard thing to take men off from their religious usages [...] people will be astonished if an old custom be denied them’ (Durstun 1996, 233). Phenomena dating to the 16th century, such as witch-posts, ritual marks, and special deposits are variations of the same need to bind the evil agent (Natrass 1956; Meeson 2005; Eastop 2006). Substitute the term ‘witch’ for ‘ghost’; ‘demon’ for ‘revenant’, and the social logic for the deposition of items in walls, or the carving of symbols on doors, is just as apparent. The need to fortify liminal spaces against outside agents was a universal concern. Practices could persevere, even if the specific meanings behind the actions did not. In short, these later phenomena did not emerge in a vacuum; the ‘rhetoric’ of household protection can be traced back across the (arbitrary) divide between the post-medieval and medieval periods, where there existed similar fears about infiltration. As James Simpson notes, the tendency of the discipline of Medieval Studies to demark and categorise history neglects the value of examining the diachronic – ‘across time’ – connections between similar datasets (Simpson 2007).

It is unfortunate, therefore, that excavation reports for deserted medieval settlements pay scant attention to the possible apotropaic elements in peasant or knightly households (Beresford and Hurst 1971). Scholarship on the subject has tended to focus on roof construction, the division of internal space and the economics of domestic life, neglecting to investigate whether local religious belief was ever made manifest in the structure of the building itself (Chapelot and Fossier 1985; Dyer 1986; Wrathmell 1989; Grenville 1997). Admittedly, this discrepancy may have something to do with the lack of available evidence: organic material is perishable; small items may be lost; evidence for the ritual inscription of timber frames is difficult to determine if the archaeologist is confronted with little more than a padstone foundation. The logistical issues involved in the excavation of deserted medieval villages also contribute to the paucity of evidence, with earthwork analysis proving a more cost-effective form of investigation (Wrathmell 1994, 187). Similar difficulties arise when surveying the remains of urban households: centuries of habitation and renovation have obscured, or even destroyed, the evidence for domestic magic. However, with reference to oral history, written texts, and the artefactual

evidence from the Early Modern period, it may indeed be possible to extrapolate the methods by which medieval communities fortified their houses against the undead.

The medieval longhouse: some considerations

Before an attempt can be made to define the location of apotropaic devices in medieval households, the characteristics of the house itself must first be given mention. Defining the form, function and permanency of domestic buildings in the High and Late Middle Ages has been the subject of much debate in recent years (Grenville 1997, 120–156). Examples of the most common type of dwelling, the ‘longhouse’, can be found across the British Isles, the basic design of which persisted into the Early Modern period and beyond. In general, a longhouse can be defined as a rectangular building subdivided by a cross-passage into a series of domestic and non-domestic spaces (Austin 1985, 76). Although the number of bays varied with regard to the prosperity, size or function of the household, longhouses generally adhered to a tripartite formula, with the non-domestic space (the ‘lower’ end) being used for storage, low-level industry, or the accommodation of livestock (Hanawalt 1986, 32–35). A smaller, private chamber, which may have functioned as a bedroom, was often subdivided from the communal living area, itself identifiable by the presence of cooking pits, charcoal, and hearth stones. The pattern of internal postholes suggests a loft or solar was sometimes constructed above the ‘inner’ room in order to provide space for an extended family.

Access to the household’s interior was provided by doorways on opposite sides of the central cross-passage, allowing for direct entrance to the domestic and non-domestic spaces from the outside. The ‘lower’ end of the longhouse was often used as a byre, something which can be archaeologically attested by the presence of tethering rings, animal waste, and a drainage system along the longitudinal axis. The conversion of the longhouse into a fully domestic space (farmhouse) and the separation of the byre (barn) into a separate building, often at a perpendicular angle to the farmhouse, began to occur in the 13th and 14th centuries; a reflection of the increased socio-economic status of certain peasant households. House 3 from Gomeldon, Wiltshire, and Building 1 from Thuxton, Norfolk, are notable examples of prosperous family units that converted their longhouses into farmsteads (Musty 1986; Butler and Wade-Martins 1989).

The layout of the medieval house may have undergone changes over time and differed from region to region, village to village, but the schema for constructing a dwelling which had private, public and industrial spaces could be made manifest in only a few essential forms. Prevailing social structures, traditions of construction, environmental and economic constraints, issues of space, and the type of material at a builder’s disposal mitigated the possibilities for household design. The width of the bays in jointed-cruck houses (that is, houses constructed from curved oak timbers that connected at the apex)

was dictated by the size of the tree from which the frames were carved. For post-truss and base-cruck superstructures, the properties of the oak timbers meant that there were only a few effective techniques for solving the problem of compression while ensuring that the living space was not impeded by load-bearing posts. As Frederick Charles suggests, local building traditions were incredibly long-lasting. Methods of construction did not fall into disuse unless changing social or economic factors necessitated a reconsideration of a household's 'grammar' (Charles 1967, 4). New building techniques, such as the development of dwarf walls and padstones, made less economical practices, such as earthfast foundations, redundant (Wrathmell 1989, 252). The possibilities afforded by constructing a house from stone instead of timber frames led to innovations in the use of internal space. The 'great rebuilding' of the 16th century is illustrative of this point (Johnson 1993). The villages of West Hartburn (Northumberland), Upton (Gloucestershire) and Thuxton (Norfolk) may well have been separated by considerable geographical distances, but the socio-economic situation of the inhabitants and the skill-sets of the local carpenters were almost identical. It is unsurprising to find that rural peasant houses were so similar in terms of size, shape and method of construction. Such similarities may also relate to the location – and type – of apotropaic devices used by the inhabitants.

Certain conclusions can be made: the peasant house contained two major thresholds (the doorways) and a number of minor thresholds (the vent for the hearth smoke and the partitions between the byre and the living areas); inner chambers were often segregated from the main domestic space; stone was seldom used as a building material, save for padstones and dwarf walls. As the cases reports from the Eyre and coroners' rolls indicate, doorways, windows and the wattle/daub cladding were vulnerable to attack by thieves and murderers (see Gross 1896, 10, 24; Hunnisett 1961, 116). Domestic thresholds, then, represented a series of crisis points – liminal spaces that were at the mercy of forces beyond the ability of the householders to control. These 'forces' need not only refer to human agents: revenant attacks, nightmares and hexes provided metaphysical analogues to the threats presented by a discontented neighbour. Whether corporeal or incorporeal, ghosts existed on the very edge of natural law and could act in ways that were beyond the capabilities of an everyday felon. The propensity of the Clydesdale revenant to 'settle on the highest part of dwellings' and its sudden appearance 'in the midst' of Sir Duncan's household suggests that the hearth and smoke vents were especially vulnerable to infiltration; nocturnal assaults could occur even if the doors and windows were locked (Maxwell 1913, 119).

Indeed, as the extracts at the beginning of this chapter illustrate, the major and minor thresholds were the main focus of the revenant's wrath. Although doors may have afforded some level of protection (see the Robert of Kilburn narrative, for instance), this was in no way guaranteed. Very rarely did a revenant's pestilence respect the physical

boundary of the house, as the *Chronicle of Lanercost* and *Life of St Modwenna exempla* can attest (Bartlett 2002, 197). Other forms of protection were needed. With the ‘great rebuilding’ of the late 16th and early 17th centuries leading to drastic, and permanent, changes to the grammar of the household (to be discussed in more detail, below), it is not surprising that the extant evidence for threshold magic dates mainly to the Early Modern period (Hoskins 1953; Johnson 1993). As stated above, this evidence will be used as a template – a ‘pattern’ – for understanding how the fear of supernatural invasion was articulated in earlier iterations of the house. The remaining part of this chapter will be devoted to an evaluation of two of the most overt and long-lasting types of apotropaic object to be discovered in insular contexts: ritual marks and threshold deposits.

Medieval revenants and the household: the archaeological evidence

Ritual marks: from ‘cross-stone’ to ‘witch-post’?

A ‘witch-post’ is a colloquial name for an architectural device that can be discerned in a number of post-medieval households. Found primarily in the Northumberland area, these posts comprise of rowan or ash timbers incised with saltire crosses and cross-etched designs. The posts were usually placed under load-bearing cross-beams and used to defend the chimney from witches lest, by crossing over the hearth, they ‘gain[ed] power over the house’ (Natrass 1956, 138). A witch-post from East End Cottage, Egton, currently archived in Whitby Museum, shows how the saltire was typically incised in the upper part of the timber (Fig. 4.1). An example in its original context can be found at Stagend longhouse in Danby, North Yorkshire (*c.* 1600), where a saltire-incised support post was used to demark and protect the main living area (Natrass 1956, 139). A related practice, the incision of ritual marks directly into rafters, lintels, fireplaces and door frames, seems to have had a similar function. Interlaced ‘M’ and ‘R’ designs (symbolising ‘Mary’ and ‘Regina’), conjoined ‘Vs’ (meaning the ‘Virgin of Virgins’), ‘daisy wheels’, and the ‘chi-ro’ (representing the first and second letters of Christ’s name in Greek) are among the many symbols found in Early Modern cottages that can be distinguished from the utilitarian ‘plumb and level’ marks used in the erection of the building (Easton 1999; Meeson 2005). Indeed, the presence of conjoined ‘V’ symbols in the entrance to Goatchurch Cavern, Somerset (*c.* 1500) suggests that apotropaic habits could transfer from one context (wood) to another (stone), and that such symbols were used specifically to fortify thresholds (Binding and Wilson 2004, 120; Fig. 4.1).

The nature of the evidence from deserted medieval villages is such that the probability of discovering incised timbers is remote. Nonetheless, if habits of belief prevail over time, and if the external conditions of village life allowed for the circulation of traditional ‘ways of doing’ within the mental schemas of the community, then the ‘rhetoric’ of

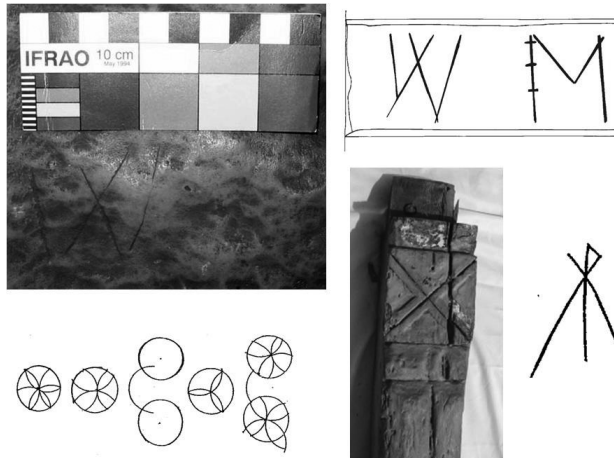


Fig. 4.1. *Top left*: conjoined 'V' from Goatchurch Cavern, Somerset, c. 1500s (from Binding and Wilson 2004); *top right*: conjoined 'V' and Marion symbol from 69 Bridge Street, Chester, c. 1600s (from Meeson 2005 © Maney Publishing, used with permission); *middle*: witch-post from East End Cottage, Egton, c. 1600–1700s (Source: Whitby Museum, used with permission); *mid-right*: 'chi-ro' from Mill Farm, Worlingworth, c. late 1600s (Source: Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, used with permission); *bottom left*: a selection of 'daisy wheels' from Suffolk, c. 1700 (Source: Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, used with permission)

protecting the household from supernatural agents – be it a devil, revenant or witch – can be expected to persevere, in whatever amended form (Meeson 2005, 45). Although Alan Pallister and Stuart Wrathmell are correct to note that 'the traditions exemplified by the [witch-posts] in these houses could well have carried through from earlier centuries, from which time no houses now remain', this is not to deny the possibility of finding expressions of this practice in different media and contexts (Pallister and Wrathmell 1990, 67). Indeed, the presence of conjoined 'V' inscriptions in Goatchurch Cavern, mentioned above, suggests that the carving of ritual marks in stone was not an unknown practice. The use of stone in this manner is not restricted to the later Middle Ages: masons' marks relating to the construction of Lanercost Priory (c. 1200) can still be discerned in the north transept, Lady Chapel, and presbytery. The presence of a pentangle on the inner wall of the refectory undercroft is a strong indicator that some of the marks were designed to be affective (Whitworth 1998, 142).

And yet, prevailing scholarship suggests that the suppression of Catholicism during the Reformation led to *material* expressions of devotion being transferred to the private sphere, with the intimation that ritual marks were a 16th-century innovation borne out of changing social and religious structures. Although it is not the remit of this paper to discuss the history of popular piety and domestic magic (see, for example, Flint 1991; Fanger 1999; Kieckhefer 2000), it should be stressed that cultic objects, such as those used in the veneration of the Virgin Mary, had been circulating in the British Isles since

at least the Anglo-Saxon period, with an upsurge in devotion becoming particularly apparent during the 12th century. Bernard of Clairvaux's famous sermon, in which he stresses that 'if in danger [...] call upon Mary [...] if she protects you, you need not fear', provides an illustration of the 12th-century belief in the efficacy of prayer (Graef 1964, 235–237). For sermons to be effective they needed to engage the expectations of the audience who, it can be inferred, were well aware of the physical and metaphysical benefits of divine protection. The prevalence of relics, charms, amulets and shrines dating to the 12th and 13th centuries confirms that material expressions of saints' cults – and affective devices in general – were widespread in the High Middle Ages. Medical miscellanies from the era contain numerous examples of the use of magical objects, material prayers and spoken incantations to cure and 'bind' diseases, the ultimate cause of which was the devil (Olsan 2003). Prayer (whether orally performed or materially manifested), physical wellbeing and spiritual fortification were inextricably linked (Gordon 2014).

Thus, the recently discovered slates from Nevern Castle, Pembrokeshire, dating to around 1180, are not anomalous, but localised, unsophisticated iterations of the pervading cultural text (Stock 1990; Caple 2012). These slates were discovered under the threshold of the southern gatehouse and are inscribed with saltires, daisy wheels, chi-ros, and conjoined 'M' and 'V' motifs. Given that these designs served no utilitarian purpose, were located in liminal space, and had been hidden from view, Chris Caple's theory that they were inscribed by workmen in order to 'ward off evil from the castle' is feasible (Caple, pers. comm.). The masons who made these inscriptions were neither clergy nor gentry, suggesting that the knowledge (and use) of protective magic extended to all levels of medieval society. The consensus that ritual marks were an Early Modern phenomenon thus needs to be reassessed. Bob Meeson is perhaps correct in inferring that ritual marks represent a 'palimpsest', a habitual practice, upon which new, innovative meanings (structured by the identity of the attacking agent) were inscribed (Meeson 2005, 42). It is plausible that the incisions found on 17th-century timbers represented some of the 'old customs' that rural communities were reluctant to dismiss, a 'rhetoric' for protecting the threshold that had circulated in the local worldview since at least the 1180s (Durstun 1996, 233). An example of the use of such devices in domestic contexts can be found in House D from the medieval village of West Hartburn, Northumberland.

Measuring 14.7 m in length and 4.3 m in width, House D was a typical longhouse, with the interior divided crossways into a domestic and non-domestic space (Fig. 4.2). During the final phase of occupation the north doorway was sealed and the south doorway extended to allow for easier access to the industrial area/byre (Pallister and Wrathmell 1990, 64). Excavations on the domestic side of the house revealed a 'cross-stone' which, in light of the contextual and morphological similarities that it shares with the 17th-century witch-post and Nevern Castle slates, suggests that it may also have

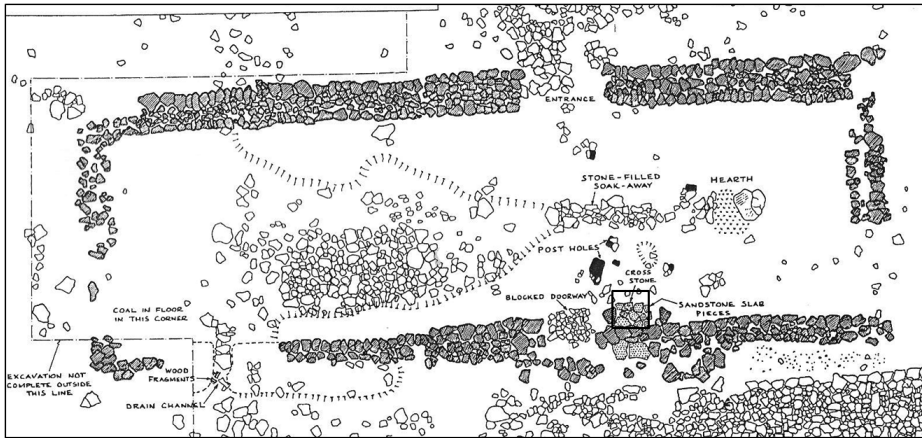


Fig. 4.2. Plan of West Hartburn House D (Source: Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, used with permission)

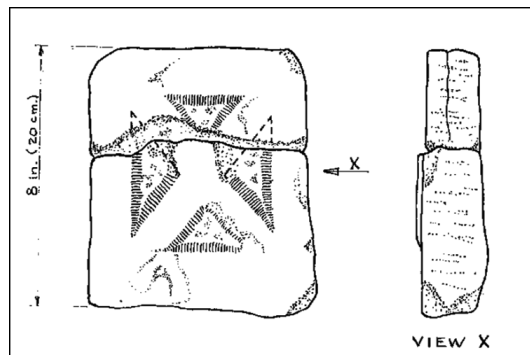


Fig. 4.3. Detail of 'cross stone' (Source: Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, used with permission)

functioned as a bind for supernatural agents (Fig. 4.3). The sandstone slab, measuring 20 cm across and inscribed with a saltire, was discovered against the north wall on the longitudinal axis and was incorporated into the door-jamb of the blocked northern threshold. With the reorganisation of the interior space occurring sometime before the 16th century – when the house was finally abandoned – the cross-stone would seem to date to an earlier period of occupation (c. 1150–1350). As mentioned above, it was suggested by the excavators that the stone was an early manifestation of a witch-post (Pallister and Wrathmell 1990, 67). However, it can be argued that its function (and, indeed, that of the Nevern Castle slates) was to protect the household from a different kind of intruder. As Gillian Bennett demonstrates, the identity of the ghost, demon and witch became altogether conflated following the rejection of Purgatory (Bennett 1986).

Witches did not inspire the same level of fear in the High Middle Ages as they did in later centuries when, following the gradual demonisation of folk magic, their role as agents of evil became more defined (Bailey 2001, 986; Jones and Zell 2005, 49). The malefic characteristics of the 16th- and 17th-century 'witch' were, in part, previously embodied by the revenant. What we now know as a 'witch-post' may have been used to curtail the advance of violent and wayward corpses. In this way a narrative can be constructed whereby Robert of Kilburn's corpse was prevented from entering certain houses due to the presence of *material prayers* (that is, cross-stones or cross-stone analogues) in the threshold. The village of Kilburn is in close enough proximity to Northumberland (the location of the witch-posts and West Hartburn) to suggest that this was a long-lived, Northern practice.

Threshold deposits

As previously discussed, the 17th century witnessed the 'great rebuilding' of peasant houses. Due to an increase in prosperity, home owners were able to refurbish their homes using more expensive and durable materials. Wattle and daub superstructures and hearth vents were gradually replaced by stone walls and chimney stacks, leading to more sophisticated – and segregated – use of the internal spaces. Indeed, William Harrison's *Descriptions of England* (c. 1577) notes that houses 'such as be lately builded are commonly of either brick or hard stone or both' and that a 'multitude of chimneys' had arisen in even the humblest of villages (Harrison 1968 [1577], 200–201). The relocation of the byre to a secondary building, and the ability to provide upper floors, basements and attic space, meant an increase in the number of thresholds through which a supernatural agent could enter. A 'spiritual midden' is the term employed by modern scholarship to denote objects that were placed in these vulnerable locations. Clothing, shoes and, indeed, the corpses of house cats, are just some of the objects found beneath floorboards or in chimney stacks (Howard 1951, 149; Eastop 2006, 241). One such device, the 'witch-bottle', contained numerous items – including urine, nails, pins, cloth and broken glass – and was usually placed under the main threshold of the house (Merrifield 1955). The aim of the bottle was to bind and protect the household from 'languishment' brought on by a witch.

The following extract from Joseph Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1681) records the earliest extant account of the apotropaic use of witch-bottles. An ostensible retelling of an event that occurred c. 1620–1640, the narrative details the plight of the wife of a Suffolk landlord, who was being afflicted by 'a dead spright [...] in the shape of a bird [that would not let her enjoy] her natural rest.' A cunning man told the couple that the hex could be broken if a bottle containing nails, pins and the wife's urine was placed on an open fire. When this action failed to break the spell, the landlord was advised to:

Take your wife's urine as before, and cork it in a bottle with nails, pins and needles, and bury it in the earth. The man did accordingly. And his wife began to mend sensibly, and in a competent time was finely well recovered. But [a woman from a nearby village] claimed that they had killed her husband. They understood by her that the husband was a wizard and had bewitched this man's wife, and that this counter-practice prescribed by the old man, which saved the man's wife from languishment, was the death of that wizard that had bewitched her. (205–208).

Given the aims and intentions of *Sadducisimus Triumphatus* (that is, as a means of refuting Atheism and reinforcing the belief in the divine), it is unlikely that the tale, as recounted by Glanvill, is an accurate reflection of what truly happened to the landlord and his wife (Bath and Newton 2006, 5). As Bennett notes, 'Glanvill's group would neither be offered nor accept material that did not fit their preconceptions. [The stories] may not have been representative of the "folk" at large' (Bennett 1986, 11). However, this is not to suggest that evidence for popular belief cannot be extrapolated from some of the incidental details in the passage (Caciola 1996, 10). Firstly, it is noticeable that the symptoms of the hex – the lack of natural rest and 'languishment' – are somatically similar to a nocturnal assault by a revenant (V.22; Barber 1988, 12). Secondly, recourse to the knowledge of a 'cunning man' confirms that, on occasion, low-level preventative measures such as witch-posts were unable to quell the supernatural agent and that more sophisticated devices were needed. The techniques at the cunning man's disposal were certainly efficacious and, given that the Reformist doctrine was ill-equipped to deal with the practical fallout of *maleficarum*, may have circulated in the body of oral knowledge for generations (Thomas 1991, 304–305). Thirdly, the belief that nails and needles could inhibit the agency of the witch may bear some relation to their function in deviant burials as 'stakes' (Barber 1988, 52). The witch-bottle unearthed from the threshold of the *Plough Inn* in King's Street, King's Lynn (c. 1620s), for example, contained a felt heart that had been 'punctured' by pins, something which may account for the strands of decayed cloth found in less well preserved examples (Merrifield 1955, 201; Fig. 4.4). Medieval and post-medieval revenant narratives are explicit on the need to puncture the heart – the seat of vitality in the body – as a means of preventing the corpse from rising (Barber 1988, 5). William of Newburgh's *Historia*, for example, recounts how two brothers from the town of Anantis [Alnwick] had to cut and remove the revenant's heart with a spade before they could burn the corpse (V.24). Similarly, the *Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna* describes how:

[The townsfolk] cut off the men's heads and placed them in the grave between their legs, tore out their hearts from their corpses, and covered the bodies with earth again. They brought the hearts to the place called *Dodecrossefora/Dodefreseford* and there burned them from morning until evening. (Bartlett 2002, 197)



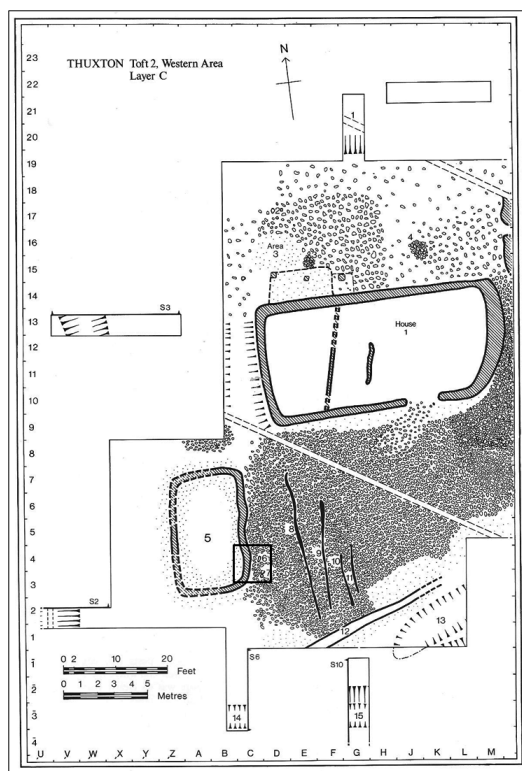
Fig. 4.4. Contents of witch bottle from *Plough Inn*, King's Lynn, c. 1620s (from Merrifield 1955, by permission of The Folklore Society)

In Glanvill's narrative, the habit of using sharp implements to assuage supernatural assailants seems to have transferred from one context (the grave) to another (the witch-bottle), an innovation of practice which survived the ambiguation of the intruder. The cunning man's declaration that the evil agent was a '*dead* spright' invites the possibility that the fear of *maleficarum*, witchcraft, had synthesised with the underlying cultural belief in the restless dead. Changes to religious doctrine and the grammar of the household may well have impacted on the 'rhetoric' of deposition over time, but the mental pattern that decided the response (the threshold deposit) to the cause (the supernatural attack) can be traced back to earlier periods in history.

With this in mind, an example of medieval threshold magic can perhaps be discerned in house AA-AC from the village of Upton, Gloucestershire (c. 1100s–1300s). Originating as a longhouse, the dwelling appears to have undergone significant alterations in the 13th century, with the separation of the farmhouse (AC) from the animal enclosure (AA) and the creation of an intervening courtyard (AB). A canine burial and vertically-indented knife were discovered in the vicinity of house AC's eastern doorway (Hilton and Rahtz 1966, 103). The fact that the burial was situated almost exactly on the threshold, and that care had been taken to imbed the knife *vertically* into the ground – perhaps as an iteration of 'staking' – suggests that it was an intentional, rather than expedient, deposit.

A 14th-century farmstead from the deserted village of Thuxton, Norfolk, may also reveal evidence of protective threshold magic (Butler and Wade-Martins 1989). Building 5 from period III (c. 1380s) was poorly preserved, with little evidence for internal partitioning, drainage systems or foundations. Its proximity to the domestic

Fig. 4.5. Horse skulls from the threshold of Thuxton building 5 (Source: Historic Environment Service, Norfolk, used with permission)



spaces of Buildings 1 and 2, and the presence of cart tracks along the main courtyard, suggests that it functioned as a shed or stable. Four horse skulls of varying age and sex were deposited at the shed's south-east corner, just beyond the presumed location of the threshold (Butler and Wade-Martins 1989, 32; Fig. 4.5). The use of foundation burials to protect the dwelling and 'bind' malign influences is a long established tradition. 'Special deposits' of dog, human, cattle, and horse bone are a common occurrence in Anglo-Saxon settlements (Hamerow 2006, Hope-Taylor 1977, 69). Indeed, the 'rhetoric' of domestic human burial may even have persevered into the High Middle Ages. Building 7B from the deserted village of Gomeldon in Salisbury, for example, contained a full-term infant burial in its foundations. A scatter of infant bones (late 1100s) was also uncovered from the post-holes of a nearby structure that had been converted into a yard in the 13th century (Musty 1986, 151). Similarly, in Upton, the body of an infant (3–6 months old) was excavated from the south-west corner of the industrial end of longhouse AD-AF (Rahtz 1969, 87). It is unclear whether these assemblages possessed an apotropaic function or if they were still-births covered-up by the occupants. However, the pointed inclusion of a spindle-whorl and whelk shell in the Upton burial-matrix suggests that this latter deposition, like the threshold assemblage

of house AA–AC, was intentional. The ultimate purpose of the assemblage – whether as a ‘device’ to protect the household, restrain the restless corpse, or to express familial bonds – is still open to debate (Rahtz 1969, 123–124; Gilchrist 2008, 145; 2011, 168).

The horse skulls at Thuxton are much less ambiguous than the human remains at Gomeldon and Upton. Indeed, the Early Modern and folkloric sources state that caches of horse skulls were often used as amulets to repel the advances of a ‘mare’ or witch (Radford and Radford 1961, 194; Evans 1966, 198; Lloyd 1969–70, 133; Hoggard 2004, 178). However, in a worldview where the physical return of the dead was a tangible, everyday threat, a revenant was just as likely a cause of an animal’s ‘languishment’ as a witch’s hex. The ‘Buckingham Ghost’ narrative from William of Newburgh’s *Historia* is explicit on the terror that the undead could inflict on livestock:

He [the revenant] appeared, notwithstanding, as if with the hope of surprising [his brothers] should they be overcome with drowsiness; but being repelled by the carefulness and valour of the watchers, *he rioted among the animals, both indoors and outdoors*, as their wildness and unwonted movements testified. (V.22)

William’s comment that the revenant ‘rioted among the animals, both indoors and outdoors’ is ambiguous, but would seem to refer to attacks that occurred *inside* the byre. Threshold deposits of animal/human bone and vertically-indented knives were employed to ‘bind’ the errant corpse and prevent this from happening.

Conclusion

This paper has acted as an overview of the techniques that may have been used to protect the medieval household from the walking dead and, perhaps, evil agents in general. The dearth of evidence, exacerbated by the tendency of excavators to ignore the possibility of deliberate deposition, has limited previous attempts to analyse the archaeology of domestic magic in this era. Very rarely do permanent, material expressions of apotropaic practices survive the destruction and/or rebuilding of the peasant house. And yet, recourse to the Early Modern material, folklore, and written medieval sources has allowed for the creation of a schema which, I contend, can be mapped onto the extant domestic material.

‘Bad’ death happened all the time. The uncertain post-mortem status of those who had died unshriven was a pressing concern for the local community. Sinners, as the written sources attest, did not stay in their graves for long. Ritual markings and ephemeral deposits were part of an ongoing proactive strategy to bind/divert the attention of the troublesome dead. Eamon Duffy and Peter Marshall are correct to note that although the undermining of habitual Catholicism in the 16th century led to changes in the

articulations of popular piety, there was an unwillingness to forgo the efficacious practices of a now outlawed religion: people still suffered from night terrors, cattle still fell ill, strange entities were still seen wandering around the village (Duffy 1992, 478; Marshall 2002, 246). Supernatural agents, whether they were perceived as revenants, evil spirits or demonic familiars, needed to be prevented from crossing the threshold at all costs. Infiltration led to languishment and death. As such, the explicit nature of the Early Modern evidence can provide a base structure for interpreting the function of domestic medieval residues. These intertextual connections can be extended to include the unsaid aspects of the narrative sources. The residents of Clydesdale may have been relieved to find that the ghost of the irreligious monk 'settle[d] on the highest parts of dwellings and storehouses' (Maxwell 1913, 118). It demonstrated the efficacy of their ritual deposits. Being 'savagely felled and batted' outside the household was much less terrifying than being 'crushed by the insupportable weight of [a revenant's] body' from within (V.22).

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European and African figural ritual magic: The beginnings of the voodoo doll myth

Natalie Armitage

One of the most widespread magical procedures for injuring an enemy is by making an effigy of him from any convenient material. Whether the effigy resembles him is of little account: any object can be ‘made into’ an effigy of him. Whatever is then done to the effigy, the same thing happens to the detested original; whatever part of the former’s body is damaged, the same part of the latter’s becomes diseased. (Freud 2001, 92)

Writing in 1913, Sigmund Freud’s essay ‘Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts’, published as part of the text *Totem and Taboo*, describes an object of ritual magic that more commonly today may be described as a ‘voodoo doll’ and is often associated with the sticking of pins into a small effigy to achieve the same effect. Yet, as the name suggests, this practice is not a prominent feature of Haitian Vodou, or the Voodoo culture that emerged in New Orleans in the 19th century (the different spelling of ‘Vodou’ and ‘Voodoo’ is now commonly used to differentiate between the practice of the Haitian religion and the image derived and perpetuated through popular culture, and will be used as such throughout this discourse). This link between the use of dolls and Vodou magical practice has been forged through myriad representations in popular culture; from travel writing during the marine occupation, between 1915–1934; through works like John Houston Craige’s *Black Bagdad: The Arabian Nights Adventures of a Marine Captain in Haiti* where he describes a prisoner everyday sticking a pin into a rag doll dressed identically to himself and the subsequent illness he experienced (Craige 1933, 274–287), to filmic representations such as Victor Halperin’s *White Zombie* (1932) and Jacques Tourneur’s *I Walked With A Zombie* (1943). The image of the voodoo doll is now so pervasive it features in Disney animated films (*The Princess and the Frog*, Ron Clements and John Musker 2009), has an extensive WikiHow page, ‘How to Make a Voodoo Doll’ (accessed 30 June 2014) that lists three methods of assemblage and is a common novelty item for purchase, even from vending machines in shopping centres (Fig. 5.1).

Yet the use of images, including those of the human figure, in ritual magic is prominent in almost all cultures’ witchcraft and magical traditions, albeit in vastly varying forms. The type of magic that is most recognisable as what we would term the ‘voodoo doll’ has



Fig. 5.1. Voodoo doll vending machine, Bullring Shopping Centre, Birmingham, 2012
(Source: N. Armitage)

its origins in the magical practice of Europe, not that of a colonial syncretic religion, like Vodou, or even the cultures of the West African people taken to the Americas during the colonial slave trade. Nevertheless, today we readily associate such an image with the often maligned practice of Vodou.

The contributing factors to the construction of this myth are numerous, with many rooted in negative depictions of race and Afro-Caribbean religious practice in the post-Colonial era in the United States and 20th-century popular culture. To examine all of these factors would be well beyond the scope and remit of this discussion, and not wholly in line with the topic at hand of material artefacts of magic. The focus here, then, will be on one specific aspect of West African material culture, the Bakongo *nkisi nkondi*, and how its form, usually a figure with nails, spikes and other sharp objects driven into it, may have been misinterpreted from a European perspective. By examining the history and beliefs about the practice of witchcraft and its material artefacts that utilise the image of the human figure from Europe in contrast with these ritual objects of West Africa, innate differences between the two become apparent and the reasons for the misinterpretation of a figure, like the *nkisi nkondi*, as an object of retributive figurative image magic become clear.

Throughout this discussion different types of magical practice will be explored, including ‘image magic’, which refers to any rite or ritual that involves the use of an image – sculpture, painting, photograph, or any other representation of a particular thing. ‘Sympathetic magic’ is the term used to denote any practice that employs the theory of ‘like produces like’ (Frazer 2009, 26), such as homeopathic remedies, where a substance that can bring about certain effects in the body is thought to help heal the same symptoms. A rite may involve the image of something its practitioner may want to bring about an effect on (such as a human figure representing the intended victim),

therefore being both image and sympathetic magic. The term 'figurative image magic' will be used to refer to any instances of image magic that specifically employ an image of a human figure.

Figurative image magic in Europe

While surely pre-dating the Greco-Roman period, this is where we start to see the first evidence of the use of figurative objects for ritual magic and the widest dissemination of these practices to other cultures. Explored at length in Christopher A. Faraone's *Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of 'Voodoo Dolls' in Ancient Greece* 1991, (note, Faraone himself uses the term 'voodoo doll' in his title despite writing about practices in antiquity), the suggestion is that many of these practices made their way to Europe from the East; likening their appropriation to that of the alphabet. Although exactly how and when this happened cannot be known exactly. From Assyria in the 2nd millennium BC through to the Ptolemaic period in Egypt, enemies of the state and other individuals, whether mortals or deities, had their images subjected to burning, burial or binding in pre-emptive defensive rituals of sympathetic magic (Faraone 1991, 196–199).

It was common for the figures used in these magical rituals to represent spirits or deities rather than individual people; such as the boxes containing clay figures buried beneath the floors in houses thought to be from the Neo-Assyrian period of ancient Iraq (c. 934–610 BC) to protect against disease and evil spirits (Nakamura 2004, 14). Or the destruction, binding and burial of wax effigies inscribed with names to ensure the protection of the King and country in temple rituals in ancient Egypt (Faraone 1991, 175). These names inscribed upon the figure were often written in Greek, as was the case for similar artefacts found in Italy, North Africa and Palestine, demonstrating the widespread influence of the culture. Nails, and piercing the effigy, were also a common factor, however, unlike the later incarnations of this practice, the nails are not to cause harm, but as a means of 'nailing down' or 'transfixing' the limbs of the victim, acting as another means of binding (Faraone 1991, 191–194).

The use of figurative image magic in antiquity also took the form of love spells. In Byzantine tradition these involved charms with wax figures laid in a bowl of blood; rituals performed with the wax likeness of the subject before it is stuck with a knife while conjuring demons, or names inscribed with a needle onto a wax figure. The names of the demons invoked were then written onto a piece of paper inserted into the spine of the doll, and a needle stuck into the heart of the image, 'likening this to the love that must pierce the woman's heart.' Again, the piercing of the figure is seen as a means of fixing or binding the demon (or angelic power) that is being conjured to the object, rather than attempting to influence a sympathetic affect upon a human or celestial victim (Greenfield 1988, 254, 266–268).

This is a small example of the types of practices that were in use in the Greco-Roman world or influenced by their culture and serves as proof of the enduring nature of such practices; evidence that their existence in Europe predates any significant West African, or 'voodoo', influence. The prevailing focus of these rituals was on the 'binding' of spirits or deities, and indeed, the relationship between humans and supernatural entities was much different during this time. As we move into the medieval period, there is a shift to a much more personal, and indeed malicious, intention behind the use of such objects; one that resembles the practice of the 'voodoo doll' much more clearly. The binding of the deity or spirit is replaced by the invocation of the demon and the intention to inflict harm upon the image's likeness, and figurative image magic became a well-known form of witchcraft during this time.

Documented cases of just such practices include: a widow accused, tried and drowned at London Bridge, England, for piercing a puppet, made in the victim's likeness, with nails, towards the end of the 10th century (Cohn 1975, 153–154). At a similar time this type of figurative magic was also described as a means of causing death in an Anglo-Saxon charter, which gives examples of waxen images used for this purpose (Kittredge 1958, 75) and in Scotland in 968, the life of King Duff was also said to have been threatened in this manner, with the King purported to have been in a constant sweat while witches cooked his waxen image over a fire (Ewen 1933, 95–96). In France, Emperor Charlemagne published several edicts against witchcraft during his reign (768–814), and laid down sentences for various crimes, one of which was the making of wax images (Baroja 1990, 98). In 1028, when Count William II of Angoulême fell ill, it was believed to be due to sorcery; the investigation into which resulted in the discovery of three clay puppets buried in the ground (Cohn 1975, 154). And in 1317, Hugues Geraud, Bishop of Cahors, in France 'was flayed alive and burned for plotting the death of Pope John XXII by poison and by image magic' (Kittredge 1958, 77).

It was during this time that magic started to be largely resituated in the realms of the satanic, and thus more firmly equated with witchcraft. In a case from the 13th century we see this in evidence when Guichard, Bishop of Troyes, was accused of an attempt upon the life of Queen Joan of France. Now widely acknowledged as a fabricated incident to destroy Guichard's career, at the time it was said that, 'the Devil gave him the necessary instructions: to make a waxen image, to baptize it with the queen's name, to prick it with pins and, if that proved insufficient, to throw it in the fire' (Cohn 1975, 185–192).

As has already been demonstrated, figures of power and stature were often the targets of such 'attacks' and throughout Europe, especially England, figurative image magic became particularly associated with retributive acts against such individuals. Another Pope's life was supposedly threatened in the 13th century (Cohn 1975, 192); Henry V implicated image magic in the prosecution of his step-mother Joan of Navarre and several attempts made upon the life of Elizabeth I were recorded between 1579 and

1585 involving witchcraft and wax images (Kittredge 1958, 87–88). Image magic, especially in its figurative form, was believed by many people, including monarchs and ecclesiastics, to be sufficiently powerful at this time to be a threat to any individual, regardless of their status. This evidence supports Keith Thomas's assertion that witchcraft accusations in Europe were usually levelled at those of a lower status than the accuser (Thomas 1991, 669). Perhaps these were forms of ritual cathartic release for those of a lower social standing, a way of redressing their status frustration without physically transgressing the accepted social norms. However, as the perceived threat of witchcraft grew, such practice became increasingly taboo.

While little physical evidence remains of such practices – as the objects were invariably destroyed or kept secret – popular treatises on witchcraft, such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* from 1486, describe the practice of pricking painted pictures or images made from wax to cause harm (Maxwell-Stuart (trans.) 2007, 157). These were ideas that endured and still preoccupied the early-modern mind, as is evident in King James' *Daemonologie*, where he wrote that wax and clay images can be used to bring about disease (1603, 44). Similarly, Spanish Jesuit scholar Martin Del Rio published his *Disquisitiones Magicae* in three volumes between 1599 and 1600 which, while not as well-known today, were widely read at the time and ensured he became a Catholic authority on magic and witchcraft. On the makers of images, Del Rio states: 'they stick pins in them, or melt them in the fire, or break them in pieces, and this makes sure that those people represented by the images waste away or suffer some other kind of death' (2000, 126). Throughout the text however, he is clear that the efficacy of such practices is only brought about through the intervention of evil spirits which the witch has entered into a pact with; this he calls 'tacit idolatry' (Del Rio 2000, 32–3).

The advent of the printing press ensured that these treatises could now be disseminated to a much wider audience. In addition to this, during the 16th and 17th centuries the proliferation of witch pamphlets greatly contributed to the fear and suspicion of witches and witchcraft at the time. As the Church used its influence to rally on such magical practices and situate them in the realms of the occult, the pamphlets produced and widely distributed this message. Texts such as *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* reiterate the sentiments of Del Rio for a mass audience; describing the act of making an image and destroying it to harm another, while emphasising the power of the Devil, and the implicit pact between him and the image-maker/witch, as key to its efficacy (Perkin and Pickering 1608). While these types of text informed the public to the modes of witchcraft to be consciously aware of, others, such as *A rehearsall both straung and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile*, relate the salacious details of crimes already committed; in this particular instance, among other charges, the malicious use of images made of red wax and stuck with hawthorn thorns to the heart, shortly after which the intended victims were said to have died (Anon. 1579).

The use of figurative image magic for retributive purposes has a rich European history. We see a practice that can be easily equated to our contemporary notions of the ‘voodoo doll’ – a likeness of an individual, stuck with pins/sharp objects or destroyed, to harm a particular, intended victim – in the various examples given. In addition, the proliferation of material produced during the medieval and early modern period would have ensured the concept of a figure used for the purposes of harmful magic against another was a persistent and potent reality in the minds of early modern European society.

African magic and the problems of ‘fetish’

Figurative image magic in Europe, then, was by the early modern era firmly situated as witchcraft, and seen only as a tool for harm. Yet unlike in Europe, where magic was superstitious, against God’s will and, at its worst, positioned in the realms of the Satanic, magical practice in many West African cultures at the time was situated quite differently within their society.

For the Bakongo people, who along with the Dahomean and Yoruba were the predominant African influences on Haitian Vodou (Thompson 1983, xvi), the belief in *kindoki* – the power for evil-doing – permeated life on a daily basis with a large proportion of illnesses attributed to it as it is believed to be a power, often inherent and wielded by a kinsman, that aims to directly kill or injure to bring about death (Van Wing 1941, 92–94). Yet the notion of *kindoki* cannot be simply situated as a parallel to the European notion of witchcraft, as in Bakongo culture there is no distinction between witchcraft (psychic power) and sorcery (the use of spells and medicines). Moreover, *kindoki* can be attributed to an individual who finds success, and can be more accurately described as ‘the art of exercising unusual powers’ whether they are positive or negative (Bockie 1993, 41–43). It is a concept then that is much more complex than the simple label of ‘witchcraft’ or even ‘magic’ would at first imply. Nevertheless, if a person of relatively good health dies unexpectedly, *kindoki* is said to be the cause.

In this sense, any ritual magic that seeks to heal does so by seeking out the individual that has caused the illness and cause them harm in return. The magic, then, is not just an attack on a perceived ‘witch’ (it should be noted that culturally this term is situated very differently than in European culture), ‘but as the Bakongo understand it to heal is to succeed in chasing off or destroying the witch who has caused the illness’ (MacGaffey and Janzen 1974, 87). The misinterpretation from a European perspective can come from this fundamental misunderstanding of the processes behind the actions of ritual magic in Bakongo society. Here ritual magic is an integral part of the social structure, offering a safeguard against any who would seek to misuse it. In this sense the role of magic can be seen as an element of social control, a metaphorical form of social justice

for anyone who seeks to transgress the societal norms for their own personal gain at the expense of others.

What is also important to note is the vastly different relationship between images and religion in West Africa and Europe. While a vast and complicated subject, that can only be hinted at here to note its significance, the various iconoclasm movements throughout European history have meant that not only the use of images in magic, but also the use of images in religious practice itself were at one stage, by some at least, forbidden. The image, and especially any three-dimensional sculpture, therefore, was much more highly charged with cultural significance from a European religious perspective than it was in West African culture, where these events had not impacted. This is significant when juxtaposed to the way in which West African culture and its magical practice was viewed during the colonial era and beyond.

It is also important to note, when discussing the perception of African ritual practice, the many ways it is still today tainted by the negative associations constructed around the label of 'fetish'; which in many respects has roots in the negative discourse of iconography and idolatry. When exploring the world of image magic and ritual practice in West Africa, it is impossible not to come across the word. Many African objects and religious artefacts are described in this way by different scholars at various times, including our subject the *nkisi nkondi*, but the word itself needs to be briefly explored to establish in what contexts it has been used, and in many instances misused. 'Fetish' derives from the Portuguese word *feitiço* (charm, amulet, or talisman), which itself is a derivative of the Latin *factitius* (manufactured, artificial, enchanted). The term 'fetishism' was first used in 1760 by the French Enlightenment thinker President Charles de Brosses, in the monograph *Du culte des dieuxfétiches*. Brosses connected the word to such practices as animal worship (zoolatry), star worship (Sabeism) and veneration of the dead (Masuzawa 2000, 243–234). Thus beginning the dialogue that William Pietz discusses at length in his essay 'The Problem of the Fetish, I', which saw 'fetish' as 'a critical discourse about the false objective values of a culture from which the speaker is personally distanced' (Pietz 1985, 14).

The meaning of the word as simply charm or magical object was consequently corrupted and, by the 19th century, was almost unrecognisable:

The fetish is materiality at its crudest and lowest; it points to no transcendent meaning beyond itself, no abstract, general, or universal essence with respect to which it might be construed as a symbol. It is this special tie to materiality, or rather, this ineradicable essence of the fetish as materiality, and the alleged absence of any symbolic (or supra-material) dimension, that distinguishes fetishism from idolatry, or 'polytheism,' as idolatry came to be more commonly called in the course of the nineteenth century. (Masuzawa 2000, 248)

The word became an 'embarrassment', due to its implication that 'African peoples

were too immature to perceive the world correctly; intellectual error led them to the moral error, in Christian opinion, of Idolatry' (MacGaffey 1977, 172). With this in mind, we move focus onto the material object at hand, the *nkisi nkondi*.

Nkisi nkondi

The *nkisi nkondi* is a ritual object that is itself a subset of the Bakongo tradition known as *nkisi*. One of the most prevalent and widely used forms of sympathetic magic in Western Africa, the *nkisi* (plural *minkisi*), when not derided as a fetish, has been commonly referred to as a 'power object' (Bickford Berzock 2003, 14). However, the often secretive nature of their use and the vast variations in the construction and practical application of *minkisi* ensure that the true complexity of their nature is often overlooked (MacGaffey 1988, 188).

They could take many different forms: 'the container, as a whole and in detail, is a metaphorical expression of the action to be expected of the spirit, which is itself invisible and formless until it has been 'fixed' (*kumwa*) in a particular body' (MacGaffey 1988, 191). Unlike the image magic of Europe, where the likeness of the individual who the magic was to work on, or the demon to be 'fixed,' was essential in its efficacy, *minkisi* were not always represented as figures; they could take the form of baskets, pots, snail shells, wildcat skins, or other materials.

Etymologically, Wyatt MacGaffey states that the word *nkisi* is related to other Central African words which translate as 'spirit', revealing, 'that they are local habitations and embodiments of personalities from the land of the dead, through which the powers of such spirits are made available to the living' (MacGaffey 1988, 190). These empowering spirits include *bakuiu* (ancestors), *bisimbi bankita* (local spirits) and *minkuyu* (ghosts) (MacGaffey 1990, 49). The *nkisi* then, is a constructed object that contains a spirit of this sort and enables the human owner to employ the power of the spirit for their own purposes. However, the term can also be used for any object that was once part of an *nkisi*, as it is thought to still retain its power even when not part of the whole from which it was derived (Van Wing 1941, 86).

The construction of the *nkisi* varies greatly in different regions. There was no rigorously set style for any particular *nkisi* regarding its form and corresponding function, including the purpose and effect of the medical ingredients used, as these were likely derived from the evolution of local tradition, and therefore varied in many aspects (MacGaffey 1977, 176). Nevertheless, the composition of the charm is in no way random. For the *nkisi* to have the power it is intended to it must be constructed to exact instructions; if the ingredients are not arranged in the appropriate order then it can become 'angered.' The medicines contained in the *nkisi* give it the life force which is essential if it is to fulfil its purpose. This is predominantly to keep an individual in good health and cure him when



Fig. 5.2. Mangaaka *nkisi nkondi*, Manchester Museum, 2013 (Source: N. Armitage)

he is sick. The *nkisi* can contain human souls, but not for the malevolent purposes that might at first be assumed, but in order to act as a 'hiding place ... to keep and compose in order to preserve life' (MacGaffey 1977, 173).

Like other *nkisi*, *nkondi* do not take on a specifically set form. More often than not, however, they would take a figurative form with an assertive, or aggressive, pose with nails and blades driven into the body of the figure (Bickford Berzock 2003, 14). As such they are often referred to as 'nail fetishes'. Nevertheless, despite this label, not all *nkondi* will have nails in them and conversely not all *nkisi* with nails are *nkondi* (MacGaffey and Janzen 1974, 88). The name *nkondi* (plural *minkondi*) itself describes the purpose of the object and is a derivative of the word *konda*, which means hunter, specifically to hunt alone, and this is the primary function of a *nkondi* figure, to hunt down and punish evil doers (MacGaffey 1988, 199).

An example of such a figure is held at the Manchester Museum and has many of the traits that Alisa Lagamma (2008) describes as 'conventions' for representing the *nkisi nkondi*, Mangaaka (Fig. 5.2). As the preeminent force of jurisprudence this figure should personify 'abstract boundless power,' and convey 'extraordinary strength and authority.' Mangaaka is generally depicted with a *mpu* woven bonnet – commonly worn by chiefs and priests in Kongo society, *nsunga*; protective bands of raffia cords around the arms to symbolise the entwining of the mortal and ancestral worlds, and raised on platforms beneath his feet to emphasise 'his privileged position straddling the boundary between life and death'. His stance is often assertive, sometimes aggressive, with knees bent, in readiness for whatever may be required of him (Lagamma 2008, 205).

The nature of this type of *nkisi* has been frequently misunderstood by non-African observers. The records for this particular imposing *nkisi* figure show the way in which the same object's use can be interpreted by two different observers. In the catalogue records for the Salford Collection (1853–1924), for which Mangaaka was initially acquired, the record states the manner in which it was used:

NOTE: about these fetishes with nails:— when the native commits an offence against any of their unwritten laws – such as theft, adultery, drunkenness – he is compelled by the chief to visit the fetish priest and by the payment of such sums (in cash or donation in kind) as may be demanded by the priest, is allowed to drive into the fetish one of the numerous knife-blades or nails found stuck in these figures.

It continues to describe the great power that the 'fetish priest' has over his community and that the native workers who were helping to transport the cargo would not touch the object in question. Conversely, a letter from O. Sonnenberg, a German agent on the coast of Central Africa for the Liverpool trading firm Hatton and Cookson, describes the use of Mangaaka in a similar fashion that we have already seen as the proper use of *nkisi*: if a 'native' has been robbed or wronged, then he goes to the fetish priest and 'begs

him to allow him to drive a nail into the image against the known and the inhuman things. He has to pay a small sum to the priest for this.' As the nail is driven into the figure it is asked to punish not just the thief, but his family as well. Both texts assert the power of the priest in the community, with the latter even alluding to the psychological effect of these objects: the priests are so feared that people 'sometimes die out of sheer fright and worry.' The relationship of the *nkisi* and the priest to the community in this instance seems much more in line with the utilisation as a method of social control than the description of use in the catalogue. But the conflicting interpretations of usage by both writers reiterate the way in which these objects were often misunderstood by the outside observer.

Similarly, writing in 1910, John H. Weeks described the practice of *nkisi* as a, 'curse by the aid of a charm or fetish', which is performed by a *naganga* (Kongo medicine man), on behalf of a man to seek revenge upon an enemy who has injured him. He describes the process as a, 'simple *modus operandi* followed by all *ngangas*, who invoke their fetishes to use their various powers against the enemies of their clients' (Weeks 1910, 450). Here, it is in the ambiguous term 'enemies' that the misinterpretation of this practice can arise. The *nkisi* are used specifically to target *ndoki* (those maliciously engaging in *kindoki*) who are thought in African culture to cause disease and sickness, yet to say that they can be used to attack the 'enemies of their clients' implies a much more malevolent nature to their purpose. Unlike the waxen images of antiquity that were used to attack a city's enemies, or of medieval times that were used to attack a monarch or high-stationed individual who affronted the 'witch' in some way, the prevailing evidence is that the *nkisi* are for the protection and prevention of illness of the individual using them, not for reasons of personal gain or revenge. Weeks' own description of how *minkisi* are directed confirms this, stating that, 'when this ceremony is performed, it is not necessary to mention a name, but only "the thief who stole my goods," or "my enemy who sent me bad luck," or "the one who bewitches me with this bad disease," as the case may be' (Weeks 1910, 450–451). There is no named target, just the imploration to assist in rectifying the misfortune of the individual by focusing that energy on who or what may be causing it.

More often than not with the types of figurative image magic seen in Europe, the specific name of a victim will be inscribed onto the figure, meaning that the person performing the ritual has a very clear idea of who their victim is. The *nkisi*, in contrast, can be connected to a client by the attachment of a packet, *mfunya*, containing parts of his own body or clothing to physically connect him to the spirit. But this can also be used to 'connect' the *nkisi* to the wrongdoer whom it must target. When the *mfunya* contains items of the wrongdoer, or of his deed (for example, if a chicken has been stolen, this may be some of its feathers), it acts as a reminder to the *nkisi* of the problem that it is being asked to resolve (MacGaffey 1990, 52). In these instances the *nkisi* is

being invoked to right a wrong that has already been committed, to protect its owner from a perceived outside danger focused directly at them; the same cannot be said of the use of figurative magic in Europe, which could be directed at anyone the witch chooses for no reason other than pure malicious intent.

However, the *nkondi* figure was not just utilised for the purposes of defending against those who were perceived as social aggressors. It was also a ritual object that could serve other functions within Bakongo culture, such as the making of oaths. In such cases all parties entering into the agreement would lick a nail, to confirm their physical association, and then drive it into the body of the figure. The *nkondi* would bear witness which meant that whoever breaks the agreement is inviting its retaliation (MacGaffey 1990, 53).

The use of the nails, then, in these figures was another complex aspect of their nature (Fig. 5.3). Yet the previously mentioned European methods and purpose of figurative image magic led to an oversimplification of the purpose of the nails and blades in the *nkisi nkondi*. The most common theory as to the purpose and function of the nails and blades driven into the *nkondi* figure is that they were meant to inflict disease or death upon an enemy. Yet, their function is far more ambiguous; they may even act as offerings of thanks, rather than symbols of retributions to be carried out (Bassani 1977, 36).

The action of driving the nails into the *nkondi* is called, *koma n'loko*, "to hammer in a curse". However, the face value of this translation is not as simple as it first seems, with the same phrase also used to describe the process by which a refugee makes a declaration of his desire to become a client of a chief: 'he activates the chief against his persecutors by ritually insulting him', mirroring the process of the *nkisi*; angering the spirit/chief in order to unite them against his enemies' (MacGaffey and Janzen 1974, 88). The nails in this instance are not meant as a literal representation of the harm to be done to another, but as a metaphor for the pain that the *nkisi* is being asked to inflict. Like the chicken feather of the *mfunya*, they are a physical reminder of the task the *nkisi* is being asked to perform. Furthermore, nails or blades were not necessarily needed for this process; if unavailable a common method of aggravating an *nkondi* figure was to insult it using Kongo obscenities (MacGaffey 1990, 54).

The specific symbolism of the nails is another element that is open to much misinterpretation by those viewing *nkisi nkondi* with any European, or particularly Christian bias. Volavkova describes them as 'wounding instruments', stating that they are the specific influence of the Christian ideal of the nails as a symbol of Christ's suffering, and that the lack of evidence before the 18th century for this practice validates this claim (Volavkova 1972, 55). Bassani also argues that the driving of nails into objects was derived directly from European influence, but states that the process occurred much earlier in the 15th century, via the Portuguese. As well as this, he also speculates that the direct influence of European figurative image magic itself could have had some influence



Fig. 5.3. Detail of nails and sharp metal objects inserted into the body of Mangaaka, Manchester Museum, 2013 (Source: N. Armitage)

during this influx of European peoples to the West coast of Africa (Bassani 1977, 36). Nevertheless, as MacGaffey and Janzen (1974) argue, while Christian missionaries may have influenced Bakongo culture, any assimilations were ‘on entirely African terms’; in many instances the cultural divide meant that the Bakongo people misunderstood the Christian elements of religion and subsequently interpreted and utilised them in their own way (MacGaffey and Janzen 1974, 88). Practically, the use of a manufactured object, like a nail, may have derived from interaction with Europeans, but the object was merely assimilated into a ritual practice already taking place.

Invariably the effigy in European image magic is destroyed in some way – especially

in cases where it is subsequently burnt; to destroy the image, destroys the victim. This is not the case with *nkondi*, and signifies a distinct difference between the two practices. That is, a *nkondi* is a protective charm, generally linked to its owner or client, whereas the effigies used in European figurative magic are linked directly to a named intended victim; to cause their destruction the doll must be destroyed or at the very least mutilated. This, again, brings to light a point of contention between European and West African cultures concerning ritual magic. It could be argued that the *nkisi*, a figure with a 'spirit' for the purposes of magic healing and retribution, is akin to the figurative magic of antiquity, where the demon, or angelic force, was 'fixed' to an object by the ritual of piercing the figure. However, for the Bakongo, there is little distinction between the object and the spirit 'within' it. *Nkisi* is a term that applies to the single entity and at no point is it thought of as a composite of two separate things; 'the European conventional distinction between material and immaterial does not apply' (MacGaffey and Janzen 1974, 88).

Conclusion

The *nkisi nkondi*, then, is a much more complex item than a mere comparison to the figures of European figurative magic would suggest. They do not just act as imitations and likenesses of an intended victim for the purpose of causing harm, whether for justified retribution or malicious intent. Their meaning is much more ambivalent and intricately linked to Bakongo culture and social structure. They act as, 'transformers that embody and channel the powers of the natural materials from which they are fashioned ... the creation of the medicine figure is an act of embodiment with the intention of concentrating powers of nature for social goals' (Wolff 2000, 207). The *nkisi* was a way for the Bakongo people to redress societal wrongs and was an integral part of everyday life and in many respects served as an agent of social control.

The intimidating and threatening pose often given to a *nkondi* figure was a means of frightening 'witches', not just in their physical form, but also as their spiritual form which the *nkisi* also protected from (MacGaffey and Janzen 1974, 88). It also acted as a visual signifier that the *nkisi* was always ready to be called to action. The *nkisi nkondi*, then, served as a real and concrete material warning to all those who thought of transgressing their social order; any act of malevolence towards its owner would result in retribution from the *nkondi* as they can root out the doer of such deeds, even if a human counterpart cannot.

It is, however, precisely the material form and appearance of the *nkondi* that can inspire a misreading from anyone with knowledge of figurative image magic in Europe. We are often bound by the tenets of our own belief system and the societal norms that arise from it. As such, the extent to which the observer brings their own cultural values

to the interpretation of each practice must always be at the forefront of the mind, the action, or in this case magical or religious ritual, as it will be described differently by different viewers in accordance with their own cultural perspectives (Blier 1988, 76). No more so is this the case than with the function of the nails and blades that are driven into the body of the figure. But this also applies to the attitude towards the cultural significance of ritual magic; on the one hand maligned as a solely malicious practice intimately connected to the occult, on the other a system of beliefs that are intrinsically linked to the societal fabric of a culture.

The ways in which these objects have so easily been linked to the notions of fetish, more often than not in the derogatory sense, reveal a great deal about the way in which they were interpreted. This can then be used as a starting point for the ways in which similar objects in the Americas, specifically of the Afro-Caribbean syncretised religions, were also derided and maligned as primitive and superstitious. When searching for the origins of the 'voodoo doll' other such figurative ritual figures should also be considered. As mentioned previously, many other cultures travelled to the Americas during the slave trade and contributed to the rich cultural heritage of Vodou in Haiti. How were items like the Yoruba medicinal figures, such as the *sigidi*, or the *bocio* figures of the Fon people viewed? Or more importantly, how were they adapted and assimilated into Vodou culture?

It remains, however, that despite appearances, *nkisi nkondi* was not the artefact of ritual practice that was the starting point of the object that we now think of as the 'voodoo doll.' While it may in appearance be visually identifiable as the figurative image magic we know as such, its function and purpose are significantly different. Unlike the retributive figurative image magic of the medieval period, it was not an object used to bring about sympathetic affect in an intended victim. It does, however, serve as evidence of the way in which one culture can project the preconceptions of magical practice of its own history onto the material artefacts of another. Or it could be argued that this transposition of one negative cultural trait onto a maligned other was in some respects a distancing tactic from a practice that was no longer desirable to be associated with. Perhaps it is a little of both, and further investigation into the cultural construction of race, religious/magical practice and the emergence of the voodoo doll in popular culture would be insightful to delve into this question further. While the *nkisi nkondi* itself may not be the historical origin of the practice of the 'voodoo doll', its misinterpretation certainly precipitated the negative assertions about African and Afro-Caribbean religious and magical practice that enabled the misappropriation of such a practice, and it acts as a necessary starting point to ground further cultural study of this phenomena.

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Binding spells and curse tablets through time

Debora Moretti

There are no peoples however primitive without religion and magic. (Malinowski 1948, 17)

Introduction

This paper examines just some of the evidence for the materiality of magic, paying particular attention to curse tablets; a phenomenon both chronologically and geographically widespread and indicative of a possible dialogue between the self and the divinity (or other world) using magic as a connector. Curse tablets are small, thin sheets of lead – although other materials like limestone, gemstones, wax, papyrus, broken shards of pottery and ceramic containers were used, lead, lead alloys and other metals were the preferred materials utilised for the curse tablets – which were inscribed and, according to Jordan, ‘intended to bring supernatural power to bear against persons and animals’ (1985, 206). Belonging to the well-attested tradition of binding and constraining but also of protective and sympathetic magic; sympathetic magic being the generic name for magic based on the Law of Similarity or Imitative/Homoeopathic Magic (association of ideas by similarities) and the Law of Contact (association of ideas by contiguity), as explained by Sir James Frazer (1993, 11).

Chronologically, this tradition spanned from the 5th century BC to the 6th/7th century AD (for discussion on the Germanic and Scandinavian runic tradition see below) and geographically encompassed a vast area including Europe, northern Africa and the Near East (Jordan 2000, 24–25).

The central theme of this brief work is to explore these elements – sympathetic use of a specific material, magic spells and curses, sympathetic use of liminal places of deposition – that make the curse tablets the ideal material objects to indicate, almost indisputably, traces of magical practices in archaeological contexts, their widespread (chronologically and geographically) tradition and the possible survival of this tradition into early modern culture. This paper would like also to re-address the modern perception of magic, or lack of, and the difficulty in understanding the psychology of ancient magic resulting in the almost impossible task of generally identifying traces of its practice in archaeological contexts.

Identifying magic

Very often in our modern society, we tend to forget that in the not too distant past, rituals and magic were an essential part of everyday life. The historic written records are a testimony to the spiritual life of some ancient cultures and of the ‘desire to influence events, to look into the future and manipulate it’ (Mitchell 2011, 41).

Often material evidence of ancient spiritual life is still visible across the landscape and, although not so often, even material evidence from the beliefs and practices of magical rituals have survived as archaeological evidence to tell a story to anybody who has an open mind to recognise and understand it; although, recognising and understanding this material evidence can sometimes prove to be extremely complicated and challenging because of the difficulty in accepting and understanding the perception of magic *in primis*.

There is no straight answer to the question – ‘What is magic?’ – because magic is an intellectual invention to identify actions, people or concepts that do not fit within the boundaries of a specific society and because the perception of magic has changed and shifted through time. For example, in regard to the meaning of magic in classical antiquity and its connection to the magi of Persia and their exotic and rather misunderstood skills and beliefs, Kieckhefer affirms that ‘the term “magic” was a deeply emotional one, rich with dark connections. Magic was something sinister, something threatening’ (Kieckhefer 1990, 10) because people perceived the magi as figures to be fearful of.

Jolly’s interpretation of magic is probably the most thorough:

Magic is more a concept than a reality. The term is a way of categorizing a wide array of beliefs and practices, ranging from astrology and alchemy, charms and amulets, to sorcery and necromancy, trickery and entertainment, as practised by both laity and clergy, by those of high and low social status, educated and uneducated, and found in diverse sources and contexts, including scientific and medical treatises, liturgical and other religious documents, and literary text. (Jolly 2002, 3)

Ultimately, magic is the alleged power/art to make things happen or to alter things and manipulate people and events in our favour using supernatural means or powers and through occult knowledge of natural laws.

Magic and archaeology

Generally speaking, archaeology reconstructs the past from material evidence, and it is the archaeologist, anthropologist and historian’s job to interpret this material evidence in order to gain insights into these past cultures. To understand and interpret the material evidence in an unbiased manner is quite difficult because:

Everyone concerned with the past – archaeologists, historians, politicians, storytellers, priests, parents – constructs ideas and images of the past from materials available in the present. Through these ideas and images, we invest meaning in past events; but these meanings may differ according to our perspectives. We view the past through the lenses of the present; indeed, people have probably always done so. (Gazin-Schwartz 1999, 2)

The interpretation of the past is in most cases biased and it is not surprising therefore to see how identifying archaeological evidence of ritualistic practices, religions or magic is a very hard task. Space and time preclude me from discussing in any detail the complex debate on ritual, religion and magic (Bell 1992; Brück 1999; Douglas 1960; Durkheim 1965; Eliade 1957; Frazer 1993; Insoll 2004; Merrifield 1987; Quack 2010; Sax 2010) but almost 50 years of this debate demonstrates that it is a complex matter to agree on the meaning of ‘ritual’, let alone to recognise and understand physical evidence of rituals and religious or magical beliefs in archaeological contexts.

Indeed the spoken words of spells and incantations and the meaning of a ritual may be lost forever, but elements of the practice of magic can sometimes be identified in archaeological contexts. The problem lies in the interpretation of this evidence because: ‘the purpose for which a magical artefact was created may be ephemeral. The goal of a curse is to bind an opponent through the intercession of supernatural powers, and neither the act of binding nor the intervention of a divine force can be measurable’ (Wilburn 2012, 36) and ‘the vagaries of preservation and the difficulties inherent in interpretation constantly impact the conclusions that can be drawn from the material remains’ (Wilburn 2012, 52).

In the specific case of magic, the material evidence surviving in archaeological contexts is very often completely dismissed. As stated by Merrifield the evidence of ritual activity can only be recognised when encountered many times in different archaeological sites and only when a behavioural pattern is evident (Merrifield 1987). Only in rare and fortunate cases is this statement proven to be true.

Despite the difficulty in identifying this material evidence, in certain circumstances, ancient texts and objects found around the world prove without any doubt not only ancient people’s beliefs in magic, but also the practical use they made of magic. Probably the richest and most important body of material essential for the study of ancient magic so far, is the *corpus* known as The Greek Magical Papyri, in Latin *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, abbreviated to PGM. This *corpus* consists mainly of documents written on papyrus, magical recipe books to teach people how to use magic but also curse texts and amuletic texts. This body of material dates from between the 2nd and 5th centuries AD and was produced mainly in Graeco-Roman Egypt (Gager 1992; Ogden 2008). The second-richest body of material related undoubtedly to the practice of magic in antiquity (Webster 1948) consists of amulets. The ancient Greek word for amulet is

periamma and *periapton* meaning simply ‘object tied around’, and their simplicity and effectiveness made them ‘the most ubiquitous and visible magical tools in antiquity’ (Ogden 2008, 129).

Curse tablets

One of the very few magical rituals that has left compelling material evidence across Western Europe and the Mediterranean countries, is the use of curses and binding spells, and the charms and amulets that counteract them. *Katadesmoi* or *Defixiones*, better known as curse tablets, are small, thin sheets of lead inscribed mostly with spells to bind and influence others against their will with the help of supernatural agents. So far, almost 2000 curse tablets are known. The majority are written in Greek, the rest, with rare exceptions, are in Latin.

There is a vast *corpus* of charms, spells and curses in the Germanic/Scandinavian medieval runic and non-runic tradition presenting a few similarities to the *Defixiones*. The use of lead for example, was advised, in conjunction with the opening words of the Gospel of John, to be used as a charm against elves (Mitchell 2011, 45), but also to conjure up elves and demons (Simek 2011, 25). The Schleswig lead amulet (northern Germany: 11th or 12th century) is, for example, a non-runic case of the use of the *sator* formula against illness (McKinnel *et al.* 2004, 153).

A group of runic and non-runic charms mostly from Denmark carrying the inscription of the formula *agla* are also on lead. According to McKinnel *et al.* these charms are quite unusual because they appear not to have been worn but rather to have been deposited in the foundations of buildings to prevent fire (2004, 155). Examples of these are Tårnberg lead tablet 1 (Zealand, Denmark; c. 1250–1425); Selsø lead strip (Zealand, Denmark; medieval); Kaupang lead strip (Vestfold, Norway; medieval); Florida lead strip (USA; medieval); and Tønsberg lead tablet (Norway; 14th century). Two inscriptions also on lead and apparently related to exorcism (McKinnel *et al.* 2004, 159) are Odense lead tablet (Fyn, Denmark; c. 1075–1300) and Lurekalven lead amulet (Hordaland, Norway; medieval).

Although not in lead, two examples of runic amulets present more explicitly a binding character and perhaps a greater similarity to the curse tablets as we know them. The Högstena bronze amulet (Västergötland, Sweden; c. 1100) and the Ulvsunda copper amulet (Västergötland, Sweden; c. 800), were both found in graves and both seem to be charms against revenants walking again or harming the living (McKinnel *et al.* 2004, 171).

Lead amulets were also used for more standard Christian prayers such as the Ulstad lead amulet (Oppland, Norway; medieval), the Kävlinge lead plate (Scania, Sweden; 12th–13th century) or the Bläsinga lead tablet (Zealand, Denmark; 12th–15th century) used to carry out exorcisms.

Although some elements of the Germanic and Scandinavian curses present similarities to the classical tradition, as stated by MacLeod *et al.*:

there is nothing from the Germanic world as complex as the curse-tablets whose use was so widespread in the Graeco-Roman world. There is no sense of the 'binding' or 'fixing' in Germanic belief that was essential to classical cursing, a notion often physically represented by nails piercing the tablets bearing the curse or even lead dolls made in the form of their victims. (2006, 231)

Of the Latin written tablets, almost half come from Britain. In recent times, Britain has indeed played a very important role in the discovery of a large number of new Latin curse tablets. The biggest caches come from Bath (130 tablets) and the Uley shrines in West Hill (140 tablets). More than 30 tablets have been found in other British locations.

The British curse tablets, as we will see later, are not strictly speaking *Defixiones*. The verb *defigere* meaning 'to fasten, to fix, to curse' is in fact found in only three of them (Tomlin 1988, 59). Generally speaking, curse tablets belong to the sphere of magic but also, of religion – the divide between the two in ancient times being almost non-existent – particularly for the British examples which were all found in temples and shrines and were all directed to deities (see Fig. 6.1).

The earliest examples of curse tablets come from the Greek colony of Selinus in Italy, dating to the 5th century BC, but it is only during the Roman imperial era that the use of curse tablets spread throughout the western half of the Roman Empire, including the provinces. It is not yet clear when the tradition of the curse tablets ended. The original theory identified its end between the 6th and 8th century, but archaeological evidence is tracing their use in the late medieval period and even as late as the 17th century (Merrifield 1987, 147).

Although most of the known tablets are written on lead or lead alloys, probably because of the sympathetic magical association with this cold, poisonous metal – some Attic curse tablets request that their victims become as cold and as useless as the lead upon which the curse is written – other materials were used. Examples in bronze, copper, ostrakon, limestone, talc, gemstones, papyrus, cloth and reused objects have also been found. The text or 'spell' was inscribed on the tablet using a pointed object, perhaps some sort of stylus similar to the one used for writing on wax tablets.

The main magical idiom used is binding or restraining. The first texts were simple, mostly presenting only the names of the victims, accompanied perhaps by a verbal spell. In time, texts became more complex: from the 'prayer formulas' to the extremely complicated ones. The authorship of the curse tablets is a rather complex affair. The earlier name-only tablets and the tablets with a simple structured text varied greatly from one another, indicating perhaps a home-made production utilising mostly scrap fragments of lead. The later tablets with long structured texts seem to follow formulaic templates

<i>Location</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>No. tablets</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Details</i>
Bath, Somerset	<i>Aquae Sulis</i> urban shrine	c. 130	Cunliffe 1984; 1988; Tomlin 1988; Adams 1992	Addressed to <i>Sulis/Minerva</i>
Bawtry, Nottinghamshire	Roman shrine	1	Unpublished	1 rolled tablet, 10 small, flat & inscribed pieces lead
Brandon, Suffolk	Little Ouse River	1	Hassall & Tomlin 1994, 393	
Brean Down, Somerset, S. side Bristol Channel	Rural shrine metal detector find	1	Hassall & Tomlin 1986, 433; http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/sites/breanDown-home.shtml	Addressed to a female goddess
Caerleon, Wales	Amphitheatre	1	http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/sites/caerleon-home.shtml	Addressed to Nemesis, goddess of fortune
Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk	Fieldwalking	1	Hassall & Tomlin 1982, 408	
City of London	Poultry	1	Tomlin & Hassall 2003, 360	
City of London, Guild Hall Yard	Roman amphitheatre	3	Tomlin & Hassall 2003, 362	
Chesterton on Fosse, Warwickshire	Bathhouse of small Roman town	1	http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/sites/chesterton-home.shtml	
Farley Heath, Surrey	Roman temple	1	Tomlin & Hassall 2004, 335–336	Irregular strip of lead
Greater London, waterfront	Roman foreshore	2	Hassall & Tomlin 1992, 292	
Greater London, Southwark	Pit	1	Hassall & Tomlin 1992, 293	
Hamble, Hampshire	Mud flats of the river Hamble	1	Tomlin 1997, 455–457	Addressed to Neptune
Leicester	North-east quarters of Roman Leicester	2	Tomlin 2008	
Leintwardine, Herefordshire	Bathhouse of small Roman town	2	http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/sites/leintwardine-home.shtml	
Lydney, Gloucestershire	Rural shrine	1	http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/sites/lydney-home.shtml	Addressed to Mars/ <i>Nodons</i>
Marlborough Downs, Wiltshire	among pottery scatter	1	Tomlin & Hassall 1999, 378	

<i>Location</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>No. tablets</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Details</i>
Malton, N. Yorkshire	<i>Vicus</i> south of the Roman fort	1	Wright & Hassall 1971, 302–303	
Old Harlow, Harlow New Town, Essex	Pit or well	1	Wilson <i>et al</i> 1973, 325	Folded 5 times with nail driven through it
Pagan Hill, Chew Stoke, Somerset	Rural shrine metal detectorists	3	Hassall & Tomlin 1984, 336; Boon 1989, 210	1 prob. addressed to Apollo/ <i>Cunomaglos</i> . Other 2 with unknown reference
Ratcliffe on Soar Nottinghamshire	Field walking	1	Hassall & Tomlin 1993, 310–314	
Uley, Gloucestershire	Rural shrine	c. 140	Woodward & Leach 1993, 113–130	Addressed to Mercury
Wanborough, nr Swindon, Wiltshire	Small Roman town	1	Rea 1972, 363–367	

Fig. 6.1. Table of British curse tablets (Source: D. Moretti)

from magic handbooks. This simple typological subdivision became redundant after the discovery of the caches from Bath and Uley. The tablets from both English shrines have shown that, although the same formulas were used over and over again, there are no duplicates. Even if the same formulas were used for over two centuries, each text is slightly different from the other, strongly indicating the existence of an oral tradition. The formulas were passed down orally rather than copied from magic manuals and handbooks and, considering the variety of scripts and handwriting identified in the Bath and Uley tablets, this oral tradition did not only reach experts in the art of magic, but the general population as well (Tomlin 1988, 99). This would explain the existence, for example, in the Bath cache, of graphically well-written curses, with no literary sense whatsoever because they were probably written in Celtic dialect using Latin letters, and of tablets with only repetitive marks written on them. These differences could indicate the variety of people attending the shrines and requesting magical help: educated people either from the empire or locals, and illiterate people who imitated writing, trusting the gods to make sense of their requests (Ogden 1999, 60). Many lead tablets with no texts at all have been found across Europe and the Near East together with inscribed tablets. They also could be the requests to the gods of people who did not know how to write but who possessed a deep enough belief in magic to perceive the verbal spell accompanying them as strong as, or maybe stronger, than the written ones.

Generally speaking, the manufacture of the curse tablets reflects the variety of writing typologies. The evidence outside Britain shows the existence of a professional production of lead tablets and, at the same time, the existence of a home-made and

recycling production. At Bath and Uley also, there was no standardisation, indicating many small-scale melting works and in Bath, pewter rather than lead was used for the tablets. This was probably a consequence of the big pewter industry in the area (Tomlin 1988, 83).

Once the spell was written, the tablets were folded or rolled and sometimes pierced by nails. The magical efficacy of twisting and rolling the tablet was increased by the twisting and distorting of the text itself. In some tablets the text was written in *boustrophedon* (from left to right and from right to left), and names of victims were spelled in reverse or distorted.

The deposition of a curse tablet was a vital ritual element. From the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, we know that the power of the curse in the tablets would be activated by the deposition in special locations (Gager 1992, 18). So far, the most identifiable sites of deposition are graves, chthonic sanctuaries, bodies of water, places of relevance for the curse itself, and non-chthonic sanctuaries and shrines (*i.e.* Bath, Uley).

In Britain curse tablets have been found mainly in rural and urban shrines and bodies of water. The curse tablets cover a wide range of subjects, situations and requests, but most of them fall into definable categories. The main categories so far identified are:

Litigation curses

Litigation curses include political curses, and are used mainly for trials and political arguments and designed to make the adversary's speech useless: 'I bind Iphemythanes and Androstheneas and Simmias and Dromon. I bind their hands and feet before Hermes the restrainer; so too their soul, tongues, work and profit' (Ogden 1999, 27).

Competition curses

Competition curses include sports, theatre and betting, and are designed to restrain an adversary or prevent the adversary's victory or success:

EULAMON, restrain, OUSIRI OUSIRI APHI OUSIRI MNE PHRI, ... and Archangels, in the name of the underworld one, so that, just as I entrust to you this impious and lawless and accursed Cardelus, whom his mother Fulgentia bore, so may you bring him to a bed of punishment, to be punished with an evil death, and to die within five days. Quickly! Quickly!

Spell: You, Phrygian goddess, nymph goddess Eidonea NEOI EKATOIKOUSE, I invoke you by ..., so that you may help me and restrain and hold in check Cardelus and bring him to a bed of punishment, to be punished with an evil death, to come to an evil condition, him whom his mother Fulgentia bore. And you, holy EULAMON and holy Characters, and holy assistants, those on the right and those on the left, and holy Symphonia [?]. These things have been written on this (EULAMON, restrain, OUSIRI

OUSIRI APHI OUSIRI MNE PHRI) tablet made from a cold-water pipe, so that, just as I entrust to you this impious and accursed and ill-fated Cardelus, whom his mother Fulgentia bore, bound, tied up and restrained, Cardelus whom his mother Fulgentia bore, so that you may so restrain him and bring him to a bed of punishment, to be punished and to die an evil death, Cardelus whom his mother Fulgentia bore, within five days, because I invoke you by the power that renews itself, the one that restrains the ... (*vores magicæ* follow). (Ogden 1999, 7)

Trade curses

Trade curses to prevent the rival tradesmen's success in their business:

I bind Aristachmos the bronze-smith before those below, and Pyrrhias the bronze-smith, and his business and their souls and Sosias from Lamia and his business and his soul and Alegosi and powerfully and powerfully and Agesion, the woman from Boeotia. (Ogden 1999, 24)

Erotic curses

Erotic curses for separation, attraction and revenge:

I bind you Theodotis, daughter of Eus, to the tail of the snake and to the mouth of the crocodile and the horns of the ram and the poison of the asp and the hair of the cat and the 'appendage' of the god, so that you may not ever be able to have sex with another man or be screwed or be buggered or give oral sex or take pleasure with another man, except me alone, Ammonion the son of Hermitaris ...so that Theodotis, the daughter of Eus may no longer make trial of another man apart from me alone, Ammonion, taken in slavery, driven hysterical, searching for Ammonion son of Hermitaris, flying through the air, and so that she may bring her thigh near to thigh and genitals near to genitals for eternal sex for all the time of her life. These are the pictures. (Ogden 1999, 37)

These included supplications for a better married life:

I register the rite and the marriage of Thetima and Dionysophon, and those of all other women, widows and maidens alike, but especially that of Thetima, and I deposit this spell with Macron and the demons. If I were ever to dig up, unroll and read this tablet again, then may Dionysophon marry, but not before. May he take no woman other than me, and let me grow old beside Dionysophon, and no other woman. I am a suppliant woman before you. Take pity on Phila [?], dear demons...I have no friends or family and I am all alone. But guard this text for me, so that these things don't come to pass and so that the devil Thetima is destroyed in a fittingly evil fashion...my...may I become fortunate and blessed ... (Ogden 2008, 141)

To date the majority of the erotic curses seem to have been written by men, directed towards women; however, there are numerous examples of curses of this nature whereby men pursue men, or written by women pursuing either sex.

Prayers for justice

Prayers for justice were usually used as a request for the restitution of stolen goods; they tend not to follow the binding formulas but rather a religious or quasi-legal request:

Honoratus to the holy god Mercury. I complain to your divinity that I have lost two wheels and four cows and many small belongings from my house.

I would ask the genius of your divinity that you do not allow health to the person who has done me wrong, nor allow him to lie or sit or drink or eat, whether he is man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, unless he brings my property to me and is reconciled with me. With renewed prayers I ask your divinity that my petition may immediately make me vindicated by your majesty. (Hassall and Tomlin 1992, no. 5)

The following is also interesting:

Cenacus complains to the god Mercury about Vitalinus and Natalinus his son concerning the draught animal which has been stolen from him, and asks the god Mercury that they may have neither health before/unless they return at once to me the draught animal which they have stolen, and to the god the devotion which he has demanded from them himself. (Tomlin 1979, 342)

The curse tablets found at Uley and Bath are all prayers for justice, and legal documents at the same time with the sole purpose of having the stolen goods returned and the thieves punished. In his fundamental work on the Bath cache, Tomlin identified similarities between the British prayers of justice and the ones found, for example, in Greece, Italy and Spain. They share the same formulas, the address to respectable deities – and this is the reason why the majority of them have been found in temples – and the coincidence of language in specific clauses. These similarities could imply a common tradition (Tomlin 1988, 63).

As stated by Versnel (1991, 2010), these prayers for justice should be considered as a separate typology of curse-texts because, differently from the *defixiones*, they are asking/pleading the gods for justice or vengeance, their tone is submissive and deferential, they are often public, mostly found in sanctuaries dedicated to gods of superior character and are closer to religious practice rather than a magic one (Ogden 1999, 39).

Another vital element for the efficacy of the curse is the power addressed. The major categories so far identified are the dead, demons, chthonic gods, Earth-mother goddesses, and non-chthonic gods. Depending on the type of the curse, different gods or spirits were addressed. The majority of the curse tablets indicating binding or restraining appealed to the dead and chthonic gods to use their darker nature in sympathetic magic.

The study of the curse tablets is fundamental to understanding the diversity of the ancient world. Through the tablets, everybody had a voice. Men, women, free or

enslaved, rich or poor, from the highly ranked politicians to the prostitutes, everybody had the right to appeal to the gods and the spirits. Never before had marginal individuals, ignored by classical literary texts, had a voice, as for example this slave, writing the following curse:

Restrain Artemidoros the doctor of the Third Praetorian Cohort. The brother of the dead Demetrios is his servant, who now wants to go out to his fatherland. Therefore do not let him [*i.e.* do not let Artemidoros stop me], but restrain the Italian land, knock out the gates of the Romans. (Ogden 1999, 25)

The British examples offer valuable information on the social background of the people using them. The colloquial Latin suggests that the majority of the curse tablets were made by people with limited access to formal education; the lists of the stolen goods suggest that the victims were in majority of a lower social level and:

even though we do not have names of many of the supplicants on the tablets, the high percentage of native names, and complete absence of Roman citizen reflect that this Roman custom was definitely appropriated by the native peasant community. (Adams 2006, 10)

A consideration of the efficacy of curse tablets is beyond the remit of this paper, but the continuation of the practice for hundreds of years should perhaps be considered as proof that people believed they worked. Tacitus, in his *Annalis*, gives us an account of the purported efficacy of the curse tablets when reporting the death of a Roman prince in AD 19 and the things found in the room where he was dying:

Human remains were found in the floor and walls, spells and curses and the name of *Germanicus* scratched on leaden tablets, with half-burnt ashes smeared with corruption, and other baleful objects believed to subject living creatures to the infernal powers. (Tomlin 1988, 81)

As stated by Tomlin 'Religious belief and belief in magic are self-justifying: the wish, the need to believe are sufficient for belief; and why not, since the mysteries which prompt them defy any rational explanation?' (Tomlin, 1982, 101), so why even ask the question? A recent study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* suggests that the perception of everyday magical powers, under specific circumstances, will arise even in modern, well-educated and generally sceptical people: especially when motivated by stressful or uncontrollable situations (Pronin *et al.* 2006, 219). So ultimately, when life has let one down, when nothing else has worked or helped, there is at least the consolation and psychological relief in the wish (Freud 2001, 97) of taking the matter into one's own hands, focusing one's energy and will to adjust the wrong done and obtain protection and revenge (Levack 2006, loc. 3469).

Lead, binding and magic through time

Although there is no material evidence indicating the use of the curse tablets after the 7th/8th centuries, its tradition seems to survive through time. Christian sources like the sermon *Homily on Sacrilegious Practices* 5–6 from Germany and dated to the 8th century, for example, warns the Christians that ‘Whoever, during the time of the moon’s increase, thinks that it is possible to avert (harm) through the use of inscribed lead tablets ... they are not Christians but pagans’ (Gager 1992, 264).

In late medieval Britain, the practice of using lead in magic survived particularly in the form of textual amulets. As Roberta Gilchrist explains:

an amulet is an object worn on the body or kept in the home to preserve against affliction; its protective power can be apotropaic, therapeutic or exorcistic. Many medieval amulets drew their power from the magical efficacy of words, ranging from brief inscriptions on jewellery and religious medals, to more elaborative texts written on parchment, folded and bound to the body or carried in pouches or capsules around the neck. (2008, 124)

Of the two examples cited by Gilchrist for the survival of textual amulets in archaeological contexts, the one of interest to us is the burial of a mature adult female from the eastern cemetery at the Benedictine priory of St James in Bristol founded in 1129. This woman was buried with a small lead parcel on her abdomen. The parcel was folded into a rectangular package containing a granular material thought to be parchment. A further seven burials at St James contained fragments of folded lead, some of which might have served as amulets. An adult male was buried at St Mary Spital in London with a rectangular lead sheet containing brown animal hair indicating perhaps some sort of healing magic. As underlined by Gilchrist and as seen above, Christian amulets from Scandinavia were also inscribed on lead rolls, tablets and crosses, often folded to contain the text of a prayer or formula (Gilchrist 2008, 126).

It is worth noting that in the survey carried out by Gilchrist, some of the Christian amulets found in medieval burials used the name of Christ, in its Greek form, as a word of power. The name of Christ was considered powerful protection against demonic agents such as ghosts and it was used apotropaically in England from the end of the 12th century (Gilchrist 2008, 126). Although not strictly speaking *defixiones*, these examples indicate a tradition connected to curse tablets and binding spells suggesting that ‘such practices had remained alive after all’ (Gager 1992, 28) and even if it is impossible to determine the continuation of a belief through time for sure, perhaps here we have an example of the survival of ancient folk magic in a Christian context.

Even more recent material evidence of the survival in the belief of magic was found

in 1892 in the form of a 17th-century lead tablet, discovered in a cupboard at Wilton Place near Dymock, Gloucestershire and now at the Gloucester Museum. The name of the victim, Sarah Ellis, was written at the top, backwards. Below the names are symbols identified as astrological and probably associated with the moon, or the Supreme Daemon of the Moon. After the invocation of seven more spirits, the curse reads: 'Make this person to banish away from this place and country amen to my desire amen' (Merrifield 1987, 147–8; Gager 1992, 28).

This is not at all dissimilar from the original format and formulas of the more ancient curse tablets and, although we can only assume that the magical intention behind this early modern example is the same as the intention behind the more ancient curse tablet, it is almost impossible to understand if this curse tablet is evidence of a direct continuation of the ancient tradition or rather a revival of the tradition. Gager, in making example of the practice of attaching curses to the colophons of medieval manuscripts to protect them, argues that perhaps the continuity of this tradition can be traced 'by noting a shift of media, from metal tablets to hand-written books ...' (1992, 28).

As stated by Merrifield:

Old rituals die hard, and although the Christian Church had provided a completely new ideology and had diverted ritual customs into new channels, many of the old practices still continued, not in defiance of Christian authority, which was usually fully accepted, but as a matter of habit. (1987, 107)

It would be an easy step to accept that although customs and beliefs may change and the original meaning of rituals may get lost through time, rituals themselves seem to remain constant in their format and formulas but adapted, by the person using them, to his or her personal belief and culture.

In much of the ancient world, watery places were considered liminal locations, 'bridges' between the world of men and the world of the deities, access points to the otherness. It is no surprise then to see that a great number of the curse tablets were left in watery places: be they springs, rivers or wells. It is also not surprising to see that the tradition of placing offerings or curses in watery places, especially wells, has survived into modern times. There is a large literature regarding holy/wishing wells across the world, and the British Isles has a fair share of it (Bauscharz 1982; Bord 1995; Green 1997; Hope 1893; Hutton 1991; Jones 1954; Logan 1980; Varner 2009). The British Isles also have a well-attested tradition of cursing wells: healing wells that provided help in cursing or famous only for the cursing.

One renowned example was St Elian's well. Originally famous for its healing properties and its holy origins, apparently at some point in the 6th century it sprung up from the ground where St Elian, tired and thirsty along his journey, wished for some water. It

became notorious for the extremely profitable business of cursing. A curse specialist or well-guardian would scratch the victim's initials on a piece of slate or on a parchment folded in a piece of lead and placed into the well while verbal curses were spoken. For the services of casting or lifting a curse the well-guardian would ask for money: in 1820 the rates were five shillings for cursing and fifteen shillings for lifting which provided revenue of £300 for the year (Bord 1995, online source).

It is easy to imagine how the victims of the ancient curse tablets and 19th-century well-curses, knowing or suspecting that they were cursed and 'put in the well', would probably relate physical complaints or illnesses to the curse and would start suffering psychosomatic symptoms, in reality not directly caused by the curse at all. There are 19th-century written records of victims of well-curses who genuinely became ill, either physically or mentally (Bord 1995, online source) and there are many modern cases (Behringer 2004, 15–19) of people believing they are cursed and showing somatic complaints to be blamed on witchcraft (Bever 2013, 12).

Although the curse-tablet tradition seems extinct nowadays, magic is still practised in one form or another and binding spells are still very much in use. One notable example of a modern binding spell that maintains the character of the ancient curse tablets, but whose format has been adapted for 21st-century magic, can be found in Bruce's book of candle-burning rituals. The purpose of this spell is to bind one who means you harm; it has to be carried out during a dark moon phase, the name of the victim has to be written on a black candle and a long piece of black thread has to be wrapped around the candle while chanting:

Take them, bind them, round and round, Stop them, gag them, free from sound, I take the fire from the south And purge the evil from their mouth I take the hatred from their heart And there the seed of love doth start Until they come in gentle guise Remove this person from my eyes. Bind them, wrap them, tie them tight. Remove this person from my sight. (Bruce 2001, 154)

When all the thread is wrapped around the candle, the wick will be lit, the candle will be burnt and so the curse will be activated. Again, this is not at all dissimilar from the original format of the more ancient curse tablets or at least, not at all dissimilar from the magical thought behind the ritualised action.

Conclusions

Obviously, this paper is not trying to force the little material evidence of magic we have to identify intentional patterns or continuity of a specific ritual into modern times, particularly when the evidence is widely spread chronologically and geographically. The aim here was to bring together the evidence of a well-defined magical tradition,

fundamental for the understanding of ancient beliefs and practices of magic and yet still under-studied.

The curse tablets – both as physical archaeological artefact or reference in ancient literature – represent a vivid example of the everyday approach to magic of ancient societies and deserves more attention from modern scholarship, but the fear of interpreting the ‘superstitious’ or the ‘magical’ is preventing this (Gager 1992, 243–44). The pain and anger caused by an injustice, the frustration caused by an evil act carried out without apparent reason and not punished, the suffering caused by the betrayal of a partner are all feelings we, today, can still relate to. This recognition and identification could allow us to understand the reason behind the act of creating the curse tablets although, generally, we do not believe in magic anymore. Perhaps the recognition and identification of the need for protection are the reasons why the use of the curse tablets spread across time and space as much as it did; or possibly, because the ritual context of the curse tablets is easily recognisable by our modern minds, we have been able to identify better the physical evidence of this phenomenon across time and space.

Perhaps what is necessary is to come to terms with the fact that in our modern society:

our world is unified by the manner in which we apprehend it, not by socially determined presuppositions about its meaning. Magic and the sacred have in consequence lost their functional place, so that they become inviting escape routes for those in search of a spiritual dimension, instead of socially-approved ways of thinking from which hardly anyone can escape. (Briggs 2002, 328)

What if, as stated by Briggs, magic and the sacred are still part of us and we could revert to them easily, when necessary? Would this help us in the interpretation of the ancient material evidence of magic?

To be able to be more ‘confident’ in interpreting archaeological evidence of magic, a different approach to the study of the materiality of magic might be suggested. Rather than trying to identify the physical evidence of ancient magic in archaeological contexts, we should understand first the psychology of magic, the meaning it had in past cultures and how much of that psychology and meaning has survived through time; as well as how intelligible it is to our culture. It is also important to establish how our modern society truly relates to magic, if at all, because ultimately, if we cannot understand or relate to the deeper thought behind the ritual action, we will never be able to understand fully, or recognise, the material evidence of that ritual action in an archaeological context.

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The wishing-tree of Isle Maree: The evolution of a Scottish folkloric practice

Ceri Houlbrook

Introduction

Context, context, context! As archaeologists, this is the central lesson drilled into us from the beginning of our educations, and it remains with us, a mantra recited religiously throughout our careers. When presented with a material object or monument, a consideration of its context is usually the first port of call. Where, and with what, was it found? When, why, and how was it made? How, where, and by whom was it used? When an archaeologist examines an artefact, they do not consider it in isolation.

However, as elementary and cardinal as context is, when presented with a material object it is sometimes tempting to neglect *chronological* context; to view an artefact in *temporal* isolation. We can all-too-easily misinterpret materiality for immutability. An object's physical properties are perceived as static; as a fixed frame preventing changing context. This, however, is obviously not the case. The physicality of objects and monuments shift, as do their social relations; it is vital, therefore, to consider them as aspects of much longer narratives. An object or monument viewed today is its most recent incarnation, preceded by a number of previous incarnations, all of which must be considered in order to adequately contextualise the artefact itself, and the customs and beliefs surrounding it.

This chapter specifically considers the contextualisation of folkloric structures, and it is my aim to contribute to the fostering of a dialogue between archaeology and folklore. 'Folklore' is here presented as the study of the traditional customs, beliefs, and legends of a given society/group, and it is advocated here that such a study can contribute greatly to archaeological theory and interpretation, and vice versa. Whilst the material culture of a folkloric custom can illustrate how people participated, the folkloric evidence – ranging from ethnographic data to contemporaneous literary sources – can elucidate *why*. Both strands of evidence, however, can equally testify to the mutability and malleability of a custom, and it is another aim of this chapter to demonstrate the necessity of considering chronological adaptations and 'evolutions' in the contextualisation of a folkloric object – indeed, of any material object.

Wild about Gairloch

It was this lesson I had in mind when visiting the ‘wishing-tree’ near the shores of Loch Maree, Wester Ross, in the North-west Highlands of Scotland, in April 2012. I had been invited by Kenny Nelson of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to present an evening lecture on the history and heritage of wishing-trees – the topic of my PhD thesis – at Gairloch Community Centre, as part of the annual *Wild about Gairloch* festival. The aim of this festival, organised by SNH, is to simultaneously foster people’s awareness of the natural environment while encouraging local art projects, and one aspect of this festival was the creation of a ‘wishing-tree’.

A young beech, standing beside a woodland trail behind the Beinn Eighe Visitor Centre, 2 miles (2.2 km) from Loch Maree, was selected for this project. Local artist Lynn Bennett-Mackenzie spray-painted the tree’s trunk and branches gold, and erected a gazebo beside it, stocked with art supplies. On the day of the festival, 13 April 2012, families were invited to craft offerings to the tree using these art supplies: white cotton rags and small wooden discs were decorated with paint, glitter gel-pens, and pieces of tinsel, and hung from the tree’s branches. As the children deposited their ‘offerings’, they were told to make wishes (Figs 7.1–7.2).



Fig. 7.1. Local artist Lynn Bennett-Mackenzie helps a child attach her offering to the wishing-tree, Beinn Eighe Visitor Centre, Scotland, April 2012 (Source: C. Houlbrook)



Fig. 7.2. The wishing-tree adorned with rags, ribbons, and wooden disks, Beinn Eighe Visitor Centre, April 2012 (Source: C. Houlbrook)

Having been established in 2012, there can be no denying that this wishing-tree is a contemporary monument. An attempt to view the tree as one part of a longer ritual narrative is stymied by its evident infancy; prior to its utilisation in the festival, it was perceived simply as one tree amongst many, with no ritual or folkloric associations. However, adopting a broader geographic scope reveals that the tree does belong to a larger narrative and that it was preceded by numerous ritual incarnations, which led to its current employment as a wishing-tree. This contextualising approach requires a shift in geographic focus from the shores of Loch Maree to one of its islands: Isle Maree.

Isle Maree

Stretching for 12 miles (19.3 km) in a north-westerly direction, its width reaching distances of 2.5 miles (4.0 km), Loch Maree is the fourth largest fresh-water loch in Scotland, and accommodates more than 60 islands, which are managed and protected by Scottish Natural Heritage. One of these islands shares its name with the loch. Situated 250 m from the northern shore, Isle Maree is of triangular shape, measuring roughly 200 × 170 m, rising to a summit of 30 m.

Visually, it has been described as one of the more attractive islands, with its neat shores of sand and shingle and its densely forested centre. Thomas Pennant, having visited the island in 1774, opines that it 'is the most beautiful of the isles; the others have only a few trees sprinkled over their surface' (1775, 330), whilst Isle Maree was richly adorned with oak, ash, willow, birch, hazel, and holly trees (1775, 330). Gertrude Godden, making her trip to the island over a century later, describes it with equal admiration: 'so covered with luxuriant foliage that a fragment of green forest seems to have been carved out and placed in the loch, set in a border of golden sand' (1893, 498).

Reeves describes this isle as 'the principal island in the lake' (1857–1860, 286). This is misleading, for in size Isle Maree covers only 6 acres (2.43 ha) and is in fact one of the loch's smaller islands. *Culturally*, however, it can indeed be referred to as the 'principal island'; as John Dixon wrote in the 1880s: '[t]hough one of the smallest of the islands, it is without a doubt the most interesting' (1886, 150), whilst travel writer Brenda Macrow, having visited the island in the 1950s, describes it as the 'most charming and most historic' of the loch's islands (1953, 85).

The local traditions surrounding Isle Maree are many and varied (Mitchell 1863, 253), centred primarily on the island's reputed connection to the cure of insanity. Romeo-and-Juliet style tales are told of a Viking prince and his bride who, driven by jealousy and madness, took their own lives on Loch Maree and are now buried on the island. Other sources – with varying degrees of reliability; certainly the Presbytery records, for example, should be taken with a pinch of salt – describe ceremonies supposedly conducted on the loch and island regarding insanity. Seton Gordon notes how Isle Maree was a 'Mecca of innumerable pilgrims' (1935, 42) who resorted to the island for a cure to mental illness, sacrificing bulls on the loch's shore, drinking water from the holy well of St Maelrubha, whom the island (and loch) was named after, and being dipped into the purported healing waters of Loch Maree.

Undoubtedly, Isle Maree is rife with legends, superstitions, and local folkloric customs – far too many to detail here. Indeed, in the work of Ratcliffe Barnett, penned in 1930, we find a poetic and rather whimsical description of the island, more akin to the works of Tolkien or C. S. Lewis than to that of an antiquarian: 'There, in a little clearing of the wood, we found what we had come to see – the stones of the Dead Lovers, the site of

the Hermit's Cell, the Well of Magic Waters, and the Dead Tree' (1930, 112). It is this 'Dead Tree' which constitutes the central focus of this paper.

Saint Maelrubha

In order to contextualise Barnett's 'Dead Tree', attention must first be given to the holy well situated on Isle Maree. This well was under the sacred custodianship of St Maelrubha, also known as Maree. Born in Co. Down, Ireland, in 642, St Maelrubha came to Scotland and founded the monastic community of Applecross, Ross, in 673 (Reeves 1857–1860, 259; Mitchell 1863, 254–255). Dixon attributes to him the successful introduction of Christianity into this region of Scotland and, following his death in 722, he became the patron saint of the district (Mitchell 1863, 254–255).

St Maelrubha's methods of Christianisation are particularly noteworthy for the purpose of this paper. Dixon observes how he permitted certain pagan customs to continue – such as the bull sacrifices, believed to have been performed on the shores of Loch Maree even after the Reformation, as part of the ceremonies for curing insanity (Barnett 1930, 113; Gordon 1935, 44) – but endeavoured to give these customs a Christian aspect (Dixon 1886, 150–151). Indeed, St Maelrubha's flexibility in amalgamating the customs of paganism with the doctrines of Christianity is most apparent in his local title, '*god* Maree', rather than 'St Maree'; evidence, perhaps, that Maelrubha had supplanted a pagan deity in the eyes of the local populace (Mitchell 1863, 255; Hull 1928, 157).

This deliberate fusion of pagan and Christian customs may be evident in St Maelrubha's purported use of Isle Maree itself. Pennant writes that Isle Maree was his 'favoured isle' (1775, 330), chosen by him to accommodate his newly built chapel (Reeves 1857–1860, 262; Mitchell 1863, 251). Whether the saint first consecrated the island himself, or whether he supplanted an earlier, pagan centre is unknown, and at this time impossible to determine – indeed, as is whether or not St Maelrubha ever visited the island at all, or whether this tale is simply hearsay.

However, Pennant describes the remains of a structure in the centre of the island, consisting of a circular dike of stones with a narrow entrance, no longer visible, which Pennant believes 'to have been originally *Druidical*, and that the ancient superstition of *Paganism* had been taken up by the saint, as the readiest method of making a conquest over the minds of the inhabitants' (1775, 330) (emphases in original). Although this circular structure was not necessarily religious in nature, it does contribute to the possibility that the island had originally been a pagan cultic centre prior to St Maelrubha's arrival and reutilisation.

The Holy Well

In the south-west corner of the island, there once stood a well said to have been consecrated by St Maelrubha. It was widely believed in the surrounding districts that the water from this holy well could cure lunacy, and a pilgrimage to Isle Maree became the central aspect of a much larger ceremony, designed to cure the mentally ill. Bulls were supposedly sacrificed on the loch's shore and libations of milk poured onto the beach, before the sufferer was taken to Isle Maree, given water from the well to drink, and then dipped into the water of Loch Maree three times.

These rituals are well documented (Pennant 1775, 330; Reeves 1857–1860, 288–289; Mitchell 1863, 251–262; Queen Victoria (Duff 1968, 332); Dixon 1886, 151; Godden 1893, 500–501; Muddock 1898, 437–438; Barnett 1930, 113), and are described (although probably exaggerated) in local Presbytery records and the *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (14.2.92, cited by Dixon 1886). The earliest of such records is from 1656 (Mitchell 1863, 251; Godden 1893, 500), although certain elements, such as the sacrificing of bulls, fell away over time.

The holy well on Isle Maree, it seems, was one of the final elements of this ceremony to remain. Holy wells are a relatively common feature of the British landscape; Jones lists 1179 holy wells in Wales (1954; Dowden 2000, 42), whilst Lucas estimates more than 3000 in Ireland (1963, 40). These wells were often employed for their curative properties, originally as part of pagan hydrolatry but later adopted by Christianity, the wells transferring to the custodianship of Christian saints (Daly 1961; Rattue 1995).

It appears that the holy well on Isle Maree was last resorted to for the cure of insanity in the 1850s; Godden believes that the last appeal was made to the holy well in 1857 (1893, 500), whilst Dixon cites a particular example of a woman from Easter Ross having been taken to the island for such a cure in 1858 (1886, 151). By the time Mitchell visited Isle Maree in 1863, however, the well was dry ‘and full of last year’s leaves, and the flat stone which serves for a cover we found lying on the bank’ (1863, 262).

According to the *Inverness Courier* of 4 November 1852, cited by Reeves (1857–1860, 288–289), the well was believed to have lost its curative powers when a farmer from Letterewe brought his dog to the island and lowered it into the well, hoping to cure it of madness, ‘to the sore vexation of the presiding genie, who forthwith revoked his blessing’. It is notable that St Maelrubha is here referred to as a ‘genie’, whilst Dixon simply writes that this ‘desecrating act is said to have driven virtue for a time from the well’, dating the act to 1830 (1886, 157). Whether it was a genie or virtue bestowed upon the well by St Maelrubha, however, the curative powers of the well were believed to have been compromised, and by the 1860s it was no longer resorted to for the cure of insanity.

By the 1950s, when the island was visited by Macrow, she remarked on how difficult

it was to determine the site of this well (1953, 88). It has not been determined whether the well was filled up deliberately, having purportedly lost its efficacy, or whether this was simply the result of many years of disuse. Either way, today no visible trace remains of either the well or its stone slab covering. However, it is possible to determine where the well once stood, judging by the location of a certain tree, as Godden did in the 1890s: 'In the damp ground at the tree's foot is a small dark hole ... it is filled up with dead leaves. This is the healing-well' (1893, 499). This tree, marking the location of the well, is the 'Dead Tree' referred to by Barnett.

The well and the tree

The earliest reference to a votive tree on Isle Maree was given by Pennant in 1775; in his description of the island, he writes of how a 'stump of a tree is shewn as an altar, probably the memorial of one of stone' (1775, 330). He does not, however, specify what form of objects were deposited on this altar nor what the altar was in honour of, but it appears that this votive tree was held in veneration through its connection with the island's holy well. In fact, it originally appears to have simply been utilised as a convenient – if not incidental – altar on which pilgrims attached their offerings to St Maelrubha after their visits to the saint's healing well.

John Campbell writes of a similar arrangement in the Hebrides, on the island of Islay, where votive objects, such as copper caps, pins, and buttons, were 'placed in chinks in rocks and trees at the edge of the "Witches' Well"' (1860, 134). Campbell compares this to the location of votive objects left for the well on Isle Maree, so apparently the offerings for St Maelrubha's well were likewise deposited in chinks in nearby trees and rocks; a matter of convenience rather than deliberate placement. Likewise, Dixon describes how the final ceremonial act on Isle Maree was to drink water from the well and then to attach an offering to the nearby tree (1886, 151), whilst McPherson describes how the offerings could either be laid at the side of the well or hung on a nearby shrub (1929, 156).

However, as Ross writes, 'a particular tree is often an integral part of the rites associated with a sacred well' (1967, 35–36); in many cases, a tree connected with a holy well is not incidental, but central to the ritual itself. In some cases, trees are viewed as sacred because of osmotic transference; their association with the holy wells bestows sanctity upon them also (McPherson 1929, 74; Lucas 1963, 40), and this bestowal may be literal as well as symbolic, with the holy water transferring from the well into the tree.

However, in other cases, the trees are integral to this custom because of qualities they themselves possess independently of the holy wells. In some cases, the trees have actually proven integral to the efficacy of the wells; at Easter Rarichie, Ross and Cromarty, the Well of the Yew was believed to cure the 'white swelling', tuberculosis

of bones and joints, so long as a specific tree stood beside it. When this tree was felled, the well purportedly lost its power (Bord and Bord 1985, 59). Trees were also often utilised as apotropaic devices, and Shephard asserts that these trees, believed to possess protective properties, were planted beside wells as guardians, possibly to ward off fairies and witches (1994, 63).

The tree on Isle Maree may have been viewed as a particularly appropriate counterpart to the holy well because of its species, oak (*Quercus*), which boasts a wealth of folkloric associations (Vickery 1995, 260–264). In the British Isles, oak was widely attributed curative properties, with certain oak trees resorted to for cures for toothache (Walhouse 1880, 99n), ague (Thiselton-Dyer 1889, 288), diarrhoea, and ringworm (Vickery 1995, 264), while it was also held that passing injured or infected body parts through clefts or branches of certain oak trees would heal them (Walsham 2011, 460). Oak was also considered protective, with wood taken from these trees employed as apotropaic devices designed to deter witches (Wilks 1972, 199). It is unsurprising, therefore, that this particular tree – on an island of numerous species, such as ash, willow, birch, hazel, and holly – was viewed in connection with the holy well.

Holy wells and votive trees are so intrinsically connected that, in the British Isles, where there is a sacred tree, a sacred well will invariably be nearby (McPherson 1929, 74). As a result of the passing of time, there are, as McPherson notes, many holy wells without their counterpart holy trees, but it is rarely the reverse. McPherson does, however, point out one exception to the rule: Isle Maree. ‘Through the changes of time,’ he writes, ‘the tree, though but a withered trunk, is still there, while the well has been filled up’ (1929, 74). Colonel Edington, in fact, wrote in 1927 that the tree had ‘been fixed into the filled-up holy well’ (cited in McPherson 1929, 75), revealing that the tree had replaced the well physically as well as ritually.

This tree on Isle Maree, therefore, may have originally been utilised for ritual purposes simply because of its association with the holy well, but it went on to outlive that well; indeed, to supplant it. While the healing well of St Maelrubha has fallen out of use, leaving no visible trace of it behind, the ritual life of the tree has continued.

The rag-tree of Isle Maree

In 1775, when Pennant describes the tree, he does not specify what form of objects the pilgrims deposited. Later sources, however, refer to its use as a rag-tree. Hartland describes how pilgrims, seeking a cure from the holy well of St Maelrubha, attached pieces of clothing to the nearby tree (1893, 453), and Barnett reports that the patients brought to the island would tie rags or ribbons to the tree (1930, 114). On Mitchell’s visit to Isle Maree in 1863, the tree was apparently studded with nails: ‘To each of these was originally attached a piece of the clothing of some patient who had visited the spot’

(1863, 253). Queen Victoria, who visited the island on a tour of Scotland in 1877 – and documented this visit in her diary – similarly observed ‘rags and ribbons’ tied to the branches of the tree (Duff 1968, 333).

This use of rags corresponds with the connection of Isle Maree to the cure of insanity. In the British Isles, rag-trees were most commonly employed for their purported curative properties, and some were utilised for highly specific ailments. It was commonly believed that rags contained whatever ailment the depositor wished to be cured of (Hartland 1893, 460; Foley 2010; 2011), and, by affixing them to a tree, the ailment is transferred to that tree. This notion of magic is an example of ‘contagious transfer’, a subcategory of Frazer’s ‘sympathetic magic’ (Frazer 1900, 39), and it is described by Skorupski using the following equation: ‘A certain property, *F*, is transferred from the initial object, *a*, to the goal object, *b*, by some method of transfer’ (1976, 134). In the case of the rag-tree, the ‘certain property’ is illness; the ‘initial object’ is the depositor; the ‘goal object’ is the tree; and the ‘method of transfer’ is the tying of a rag. The illness is thus transferred from the person, through the rag – the ‘vehicle of the disease’, as Hartland terms it (1893, 460) – and into the tree.

The nail-tree of Isle Maree

At some point during its ritual career, the tree of Isle Maree shed its rags and ribbons and became predominantly a nail-tree. Mitchell describes how the tree was ‘studded with nails’ (1863, 253), whilst Hartland observes how ‘[m]any of the nails are believed to be covered with the bark, which appears to be growing over them’ (1893, 453–454). This reincarnation as a nail-tree is a logical next evolutionary step from the rag-tree; pins and nails were particularly popular ‘vehicles of transfer’ in the British Isles. Knocking nails into an oak tree, for example, was a well-known remedy for toothache in Cornwall. The toothache was believed to transfer into the tree, from the sufferer, through the nail (Walhouse 1880, 99n; Porteous 1928, 188). Pins were also employed as cures for warts; inserted into each wart, then into the bark of an ash tree, this was believed to transfer the affliction to the tree (Wilks 1972, 121).

The transformation of the rag-tree into a nail-tree, however, was probably wholly incidental. As has been observed, the rags and ribbons were attached to the tree using nails (Mitchell 1863, 253; Hartland 1893, 453). The nails were therefore convenient tools utilised for securing offerings, rather than offerings themselves. However, cloth decomposes much faster than iron; the nails would therefore survive long after the rags and ribbons had decayed. This natural process, leaving the tree studded with nails rather than adorned with rags, likely led to the misconception that the tree on Isle Maree was intended as a nail-tree. Pilgrims to the island therefore began inserting nails as votive offerings or vehicles of transference in and of themselves.

‘Any metal article ...’

The tree on Isle Maree did not remain exclusively a nail-tree for long – if at all. Numerous other metal objects were reported to have been affixed to the bark of this tree. Mitchell mentions two buckles (1863, 253), and Godden lists ‘nails, screws, and rusty iron fragments’ amongst the offerings attached to the tree (1893, 499). In fact, Dixon reports the belief that ‘any metal article’ should be attached to the tree (1886, 150), whilst Godden remarks that by the time she visited the island in the 1890s, ‘the driving in of a bit of metal is the only necessary act’ (1893, 499).

The tree on Isle Maree, however, is not unique in its loose stipulation of the type of objects offered. Certainly in the British Isles, pins and nails were not the only metal objects to be attached to or inserted into trees for curative purposes. Beside the well of St. Enoch or Thenew, Glasgow, stood a tree onto which pilgrims nailed small pieces of tin-iron, shaped to represent the parts of the body which had been cured by the water of the well (Walker 1883, 190). Other metal objects attached to trees or dropped into British holy wells included buckles (Jones 1954, 92), gilt buttons (Hartland 1893, 453), keys, and fish hooks (Bord and Bord 1985, 90–91).

The loose stipulation of ‘any metal article’, however, may not have been quite as nonchalant as it sounds; it was, perhaps, the material of the objects rather than the objects themselves that was considered integral to the ritual on Isle Maree. For in the British Isles, and particularly in Scotland, metals were imbued with much preternatural power, both curative and protective. In Scotland, it was believed that metals, especially iron, steel, and silver, repelled malevolent supernatural creatures, such as fairies and spirits (Lawrence 1898, 26; Evans Wentz 1911, 87; Firth 1922, 76). For this reason, needles were stuck into children’s caps (Hull 1928, 134); iron nails were hammered into the front board of beds; newborns supped their first drinks from silver spoons or coins to prevent abduction from fairies (Firth 1922, 76); and other metal objects such as reaping-hooks were placed under beds or beneath windows (McPherson 2003, 101).

The horse-shoe was another metal object widely utilised as an apotropaic device, hung up in homes to repel witches (Lawrence 1898, 7), and the iron plates of shoes worn by farm labourers would be fastened onto doors for the same purpose (Lawrence 1898, 32). Certain metals were also considered highly curative. Broadwood advocates that it was the belief that iron gives water a tonic property, strengthening the drinker, which led to the tradition of depositing nails and pins into holy wells (1898, 368). Indeed, in the Hebrides, a popular cure against enchantment was to place pieces of steel in the milk of cows believed to have been bewitched; the drinkers of such milk would be protected from sorcery (Lawrence 1898, 33), whilst in Dumfries and Galloway, a flat piece of silver known as the ‘Lockerby Penny’ was widely esteemed as a remedy for madness in cattle (Henderson 1879, 163).

It is likely, therefore, that the vague stipulation of ‘any metal article’ does not indicate

indifference towards the form of offering given on the island. Instead, it indicates both a local and national belief in the protective and curative properties of metal evidently prevalent during the 19th century. However, by the late 1800s, this broad category of ritual deposits had narrowed once more, and one particular metal votive object came to the fore: the coin.

The coin-tree of Isle Maree

The sources indicate that, for as long as the tree and the holy well on Isle Maree have been ritually employed, coins have been amongst the offerings deposited there. When the tree was still predominantly a rag-tree, it appears that pilgrims would also leave coins as an offering on the well (Barnett 1930, 114). The coins eventually began to be inserted into clefts and cracks in the bark of the rag-tree itself, rather than left beside the well. Mitchell, writing in 1863, describes how '[c]ountless pennies and halfpennies are driven edge-ways into the wood', as well as numerous other offerings, such as rags and nails (1863, 253).

However, by the time of Queen Victoria's visit to the island in 1877, it had become the custom 'for everyone who goes there to insert with a hammer a copper coin, as a sort of offering to the saint' (Duff 1963, 332); the coin had thus become the prominent offering. Indeed, by the 1890s, it was being referred to as 'the money tree' (Muddock 1898, 437), and by Colonel Edington's visit in 1927, no pins or nails were visible in the bark of the tree, only coins (McPherson 1929, 75) – so many coins, in fact, that Edington describes the tree as 'covered with metallic scales ... something like what is depicted on a dragon' (cited in McPherson 1929, 75).

The hundreds of coins inserted into clefts and cracks have no doubt taken their toll on this tree, which is now dead. It was still alive in the 1860s, when Mitchell described how the bark continued to grow over the coins (1863, 253), but Queen Victoria described it as an 'old tree' in 1877 (Duff 1968, 332), and Dixon observed in 1886 that it was 'nearly dead' (1886, 150). By 1927, when Colonel Edington visited, it was a 'bare trunk ... evidently dead', propped up against a neighbouring tree (cited by McPherson 1929, 75), and McPherson believed that this 'holy tree shared the fate of the holy well – the devotion of pilgrims has proven its undoing. The coins, hammered in and destroying the bark, have killed the object of their veneration' (1929, 75); evidently, copper poisoning is assumed to have caused the death of this tree (MacLeish 1968, 420).

The death of the tree, however, has not led to the death of the tradition. Indeed, it appears to have proliferated; as the original tree became too densely coined, the custom appears to have spread to surrounding trees. By the 1950s, people had begun inserting coins into the stake used to prop up the original tree as well as into the barks of surrounding trees (Macrow 1953, 88–89). In 2002, when the North of Scotland Archaeological Society conducted a survey of the site, they observed that the original

coin-tree (referred to in their report as a votive tree, and catalogued as VT1) was leaning on six spars, also embedded with coins, and counted two subsidiary parts of VT1, scattered some distance away, VT2 and VT3 (North of Scotland Archaeology Society 2002, 22–23). In total, they catalogued nine boles and spars embedded with coins on Isle Maree. However, in the intervening decade between their 2002 survey and my own fieldwork, on 14 April 2012, this number had further increased, evidence that the tradition has far from fallen out of popularity.

The coin-tree today

Roughly 10 m beyond the entrance into Isle Maree's wooded centre, walking north-east from the island's southern beach, is a small clearing, just below the burial ground. The path, which has been created by numerous traversing feet, stops once it reaches a cluster of eight logs and spars, leaning against each other, surrounded by a further seven trees, stumps, and logs standing just over 20 m north of the southern shore, all of which have coins embedded into their barks (Figs 7.3–7.5). On the day of my fieldwork, there were approximately 2000 coins inserted into or placed on these trees, or on the ground surrounding them, dating from 1875 to 2010.



Fig. 7.3. The cluster of coin-trees on Isle Maree, April 2012 (Source: C. Houlbrook)

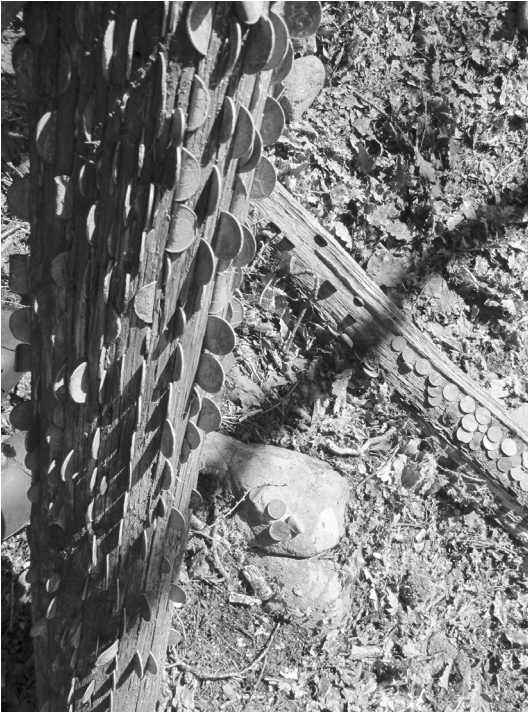


Fig. 7.4. The coins, which are coloured blue-green from verdigris, in the coin-trees of Isle Maree, April 2012 (see front cover) (Source: C. Houlbrook)



Fig. 7.5. Coins sitting atop one of the coin-trees on Isle Maree, April 2012 (Source: C. Houlbrook)

The central bole is most likely the original votive tree. It is 4.8 m in length, and is embedded with 613 coins, inserted longitudinally up the trunk, ranging in date from 1897 to 2009. The majority of these coins are pre-decimalisation, i.e. pre-1971 (predominantly 1p but also ½p and 2s), but there are also many which are post-decimalisation, ranging from 1p pieces to a 50p piece. There is also some foreign coinage, including a Dutch 5 guilder coin from 1985, 10 Dutch cents, 1 Euro cent, and 1 US cent.

Today, coins undoubtedly dominate as the most popular offering deposited there, but they are certainly not the only objects to have been attached to these trees in recent years. Adorning an upper limb of the central (and possibly original) tree is a badge shaped as a golden eagle, a silver chain, a crystal love-heart earring, and one nail. A nail was also found inserted into another tree, and embedded into another was a screw. Placed atop a horizontal log was a red candle, and another tree contained no coins at all, but attached to one of its upper limbs was one metal badge clip, two black hair bobbles, one metal hairclip, one pink rag, one piece of string, and one leather bootlace (Figs 7.6–7.8).



Fig. 7.6. A metal eagle badge, silver chain, and love-heart earring attached to one of the coin-trees on Isle Maree (Source: C. Houlbrook)

Represented by these various deposits are the numerous ritual incarnations the tree of Isle Maree has embodied, whether the depositors were conscious or not of them. The candle is obviously an object with a multitude of ritual associations, from its symbolism in Christianity to its use in New Age paganism. The nails and screw hark back to a time when the main tree was employed as a nail-tree. The golden eagle badge, silver chain, and metal hairclip evoke the loose stipulation that ‘any metal article’ will do, while the pink rag, piece of string, bootlace, and, indeed, all of the other items which would have been worn close to the body – the hair bobbles and the love-heart earring – recall the tree’s utilisation as a rag-tree, and the belief that a disease can transfer from the sufferer to the tree via a vehicle of transference (*i.e.* an object once worn close to the body of the sufferer).

The tree of Isle Maree is evidently far from exclusive. It is able to accommodate all of these traditions simultaneously, which may go some way in explaining how this custom has survived, whilst others have not. As has been observed previously, monuments are not static. This, however, refers to more than their physical locations; culturally, these trees are malleable. They can embody numerous traditions at any one time, and they can shift from one incarnation to another, following the mutable tides of fashion (Houlbrook 2014).

With the rise of Christianity, Isle Maree’s pagan associations were purportedly easily supplanted by St Maelrubha, who was believed to have sanctified the island and, by association, the tree itself. Unsurprisingly, some of the more perceptibly ‘pagan’ customs fell away; the sacrificing of the bulls and the pouring of libations, for example, but the remaining traditions adapted well to Christianity. However, with the loosening grip of the Church and the declining faith in the power of saints and their holy wells, the traditions needed to adapt further still in order to retain their popularity.

By the time the tree had become predominantly a coin-tree in the late 19th century, for example, its purpose had changed. It had become a ‘wishing-tree’, a term employed by Dixon (1886, 150), Godden (1893, 499), McPherson (1929, 76), Barnett (1930, 114), and Macrow (1953, 88–89). It was now believed that, as described by McPherson, a ‘wish silently formed when any metal article was attached to the tree, or coin driven in, would certainly be realised’ (1929, 76). No longer associated with healing, the tree became imbued with the power to grant wishes or to ensure good luck (MacLeish 1968, 420), the only two traditions which participants seem to observe today. Local residents in Gairloch, for example, associate the tree with only two things: wish-making and good luck. The tree has therefore shed its (Christianised) curative properties and become a wishing-tree instead, a custom much more inclusive – albeit perhaps less earnestly observed.

Fig. 7.7. A red candle placed on one of the coin-trees on Isle Maree (Source: C. Houlbrook)



Fig. 7.8. Two black hair bobbles, one metal hairclip, one pink rag, one piece of string, and one leather bootlace attached to one of the trees on Isle Maree (Source: C. Houlbrook)

The current incarnation

Certain practicalities often determine whether a tradition persists or wanes, and one such practicality is accessibility. Naturally, Isle Maree has never been particularly easy to access. However, if the need was strong enough then the means had been found; when Isle Maree was faithfully resorted to for the cure of insanity, pilgrims would go to many lengths to reach the island. A boat would be hired, along with someone who could adeptly navigate the dangerous outcroppings of rock on Loch Maree. Even when the holy well had supposedly lost its powers, and the votive tree had evolved into a wishing-tree, the island would be visited often enough, mainly by tourists who had hired boats and gillies for fishing on the loch, and would make side-trips to Isle Maree out of curiosity, having heard of its reputation.

In recent decades, tourists and locals alike have had the opportunity to visit Isle Maree on boat tours, organised by the Loch Maree Hotel – indeed, Queen Victoria (Duff 1968, 328), folklorist Muddock (1898, 437), and Colonel Edington (McPherson 1929, 75) all reached the island using this hotel's service, as did many of the local residents of Gairloch who had visited Isle Maree during the last few decades. Unless you owned your own boat – privately owned non-motorised boats are permitted on the loch (Kenny Nelson, Scottish Natural Heritage, pers. comm., 14 April 2012) – the only way to reach Isle Maree was either through these boat tours, or to hire a rowing boat yourself from the Loch Maree Hotel.

However, in 2010 this hotel closed, and extensive damage caused to the structure's interior due to a water-pipe burst has meant that any plans for re-opening will be greatly delayed. Subsequently, there is no longer any easy way to reach Isle Maree, and Scotland's National Nature Reserves website advises that the 'islands can only be reached by non-motorised craft and this can be difficult or even dangerous – so they are best appreciated from the shore' (Scotland's National Nature Reserves 2010).

Obviously Isle Maree still receives some visitors; five coins inserted into the trees were dated 2009 and one was dated 2010, indicating that at least one group has been to the island since the closure of the Loch Maree Hotel. The six Dutch coins inserted into these trees also suggests that the wealthy family from the Netherlands, who own the land north of Loch Maree, may have visited the island using a private boat. However, if the Loch Maree Hotel remains closed, and no company in the area begins to offer replacement boat tours, then fewer and fewer visitors will reach the island, and the custom of the wishing-tree will eventually cease to be observed. Perhaps it is the fear of the loss of this local tradition which led to the creation of the wishing-tree as part of the *Wild about Gairloch* festival, to which we have come full circle.

In this 2012 reproduction, many of the customs of the Isle Maree tree are – either consciously or unconsciously – observed. The wooden disks were deliberately chosen to

represent coins, a direct link to the coin-tree, whilst the strips of cloth were no doubt intended to evoke the tradition of the rag-tree. The nailing of these offerings perhaps harks back to the tree's employment as a nail-tree, and the use of tinsel, glitter pens, and gold spray-paint may recall the loose stipulation of 'any metal article' representing a wish. Here, therefore, is another tree which successfully accommodates an amalgamation of traditions. However, despite its invocations of the earlier customs, it is very much a *modern* recontextualisation.

The tree of Isle Maree was once resorted to by patients diagnosed with insanity, as part of serious, earnestly conducted ceremonies. Today, however, the re-created wishing-tree is intended for the play of children, whose offerings are colourful simulacrum of the real things. The tree of Isle Maree was once imbued with powerful healing properties, inherently associated closely with the holy well of St Maelrubha. This re-creation, however, is connected with no areas or monuments of ritual significance, and is employed for simple wishes. This demonstrates the importance of applicability in adaptation; because few adults would earnestly observe such customs, a slightly less discerning audience is targeted: children (Houlbrook 2014). And because the participants can no longer easily reach the tree on Isle Maree, the tradition, aptly fluid, will come to them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the tree on Isle Maree is a prime example of folkloric evolution made manifest, and this paper has illustrated how a consideration of the materiality of a monument can testify to change and mutability. By focusing on the physical properties of the wishing-tree of Isle Maree, and its reproduction, a sense of fluidity emerges, reflecting the shifting customs they have been appropriated and re-appropriated for over the centuries. Evidently change is not an incidental factor of a custom, but an integral one. Longevity necessitates malleability, and both the custom and its material manifestation – in this case, the trees – must adapt in order to survive.

The mutability of the Isle Maree tree is clearly evident in the number of forms it has adopted, transforming from an altar of convenience to a rag-tree in its own right; from a rag-tree to a nail-tree; from a nail-tree to a coin-tree; from one coin-tree to a cluster of coin-trees; and finally, to a more accessible reproduction behind the Beinn Eighe Visitor Centre. Judging by this malleability, it is clear that considering a folkloric custom in material form should not mean studying an object or structure as a permanent fixture; neither should it involve the assumption that the beliefs and customs which surround it are equally static. Instead, we should be viewing the material object as one page in a much longer biography and as one part of a much larger whole.

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Ciki and jiki: The inner and outer layers of healers' workspaces in Madina, Accra

Bryn Trevelyan James

Introduction

This chapter presents the workspaces of two healers operating in the mixed medical culture of a migrant community in Accra, Ghana. The main aims are to (i) document the primary locations within which each practitioner performed their therapeutic roles; and (ii), consider how such spaces are both structured by, and structure, individual healers' practices. Analysis is framed within John Barrett's (2001) archaeological reading of agency and practice theory, and explores ways indigenous conceptions of *ciki* and *jiki*, the Inner and Outer regions of experience and interaction, relate across different medico-religious spaces. Discursive ethnographic accounts engage with the contrasting architectural and spatial strategies of two healers: Adamu, a *mai-magani*, or 'medicine-man', an open, publically consulting herbalist dealing primarily with natural ailments, and Abdallah, a *may-jinya*, or 'spirit-man', who maintains a private, hidden world with a greater focus on ritual practice. Potential of the issues raised for further study is explored towards the conclusion through re-interpretation of an early 20th-century medico-religious space documented among a West African migrant community in Tripoli (Tremearne 1914).

Primary data is drawn from a broader PhD thesis, entitled: *The Healer's Tools – A study of Material Assemblages amongst Healing Practitioners in Ghana and their Archaeological Implications* (Trevelyan James 2014b). At the core of the project were two seasons of fieldwork engagements (2010/11) with practitioners operating across the Muslim migrant community of Madina *zongo*; a 'strangers' quarters' with a predominantly Hausa speaking population on the outskirts of Ghana's capital, Accra. *Zongo* sites have a long history across the urban centres of Western and Central sub-Saharan Africa (Curtin 1985, 605). Ethnically heterogeneous, predominantly Muslim enclaves (Pellow 1991, 423), they have been subject to considerable anthropological study (Hill 1966; Cohen 1969; Works 1972; Barnes 1986). Schildkrout's (1970; 1978) defining texts on ethnicity in the Ghanaian *zongo*, focused on Kumasi, found such communities' most significant features related to incomers' adoption of the twin pillars of a new *zongo* identity: Islam as a common religion and dominant cosmology and Hausa, both as a shared language and source of cultural capital.

Pellow (1987, 496), writing on Accra's *zongo*, notes such districts' medical cultures are complex but consistent fields of practice, unifying varied regional, indigenous ethnopharmacopeia and belief alongside Islamic systems. The term 'indigenous medicine' is used here in the manner of Kankpeyeng, Nkumbaan and Insoll (2011, 205) to distinguish African medicinal practices. In the Madina study area, the Hausa term *magani* (medicine) connotes these diverse strands of *zongo* medical culture. *Magani*, a mixture of indigenous and Islamic herbal and ritual practices, is subject to a body of literature (*e.g.* Lewis Wall 1988; Last 2004; Trevelyan James 2014a). However, as with African well-being practices generally, it remains understudied from a materialist perspective (Insoll 2011, 145; Morris 2011, 245).

The research's purpose was thus to expand understandings of material aspects of the West African healers' role: exploring the way therapeutic practices shape, and are shaped by, their lived spaces; the artefact assemblages structuring and supporting these practices; and the substances and medicines through which they communicate well-being to others. Contemporary encounters also presented an opportunity to broaden perspectives on the interpretive issues to consider when exploring archaeological evidence of the search for healing in the past. It was through these engagements that the role of compounds as performative contexts for medicinal and ritual activities emerged as a significant theme.

Theoretical framework

Archaeologies of ritual and religion, perhaps due to their reliance upon static material residues, have a bias towards conceptualising the generative contexts and practices through correspondingly static interpretations (Insoll 2009, 288–289). Recent research, such as Insoll's (2007, 142) excavations at Tallensi sites in northern Ghana, has challenged this tendency, demonstrating that shrines and sacred groves, rather than being static constructs, were altered in material configuration and meaning by social practices over time (see also Chouin 2002). Acknowledgement of these critiques renders the imposition of a spatial typological methodology redundant, leading to this study's adoption of an approach open to more fluid and changing patterns of ritual site usage.

To seek such broader interpretive perspectives on medico-religious activities in the past, analysis is framed within Barrett's (2001) theories of the material conditions of agency and practice (see also Bourdieu 1977; 1990; Dornan 2002; Pauketat 2010). Taking inspiration from Giddens' (1984; 1985) 'structuration theory', views of space as static, neutral, or passive, or of spaces as backdrops for, or containers of, social action, are rejected (see also Richards 1993; 2004). Analysis instead approaches workspaces as the 'inhabited material conditions' which are one element in the social practices and performances of indigenous healers (Barrett 2001, 156). The applicability of the cases

and this framework for opening such alternate perspectives is explored at the chapter's close through reanalysis of a migrant Hausa spirit temple, documented a century ago (Tremearne 1914).

It should be stressed this framework does not negate the importance of spatiality and materiality to analysis of healing practices. As Henrietta Moore (1996, ix) argues, social systems consist of social practices spatially situated, produced and reproduced through the actions of knowledgeable actors acting on, and in, material worlds. In Madina, objects and substances stored and displayed in healing contexts, as well as the performances bringing these assemblages into therapeutic action, certainly have significance to both practitioners and clients. Therefore, whilst accepting the inevitability of multiple readings (Pearson and Richards 1994, 5), in this study analysis of the material dimension is fundamental to a contextual interpretation of individual healers' practices and beliefs.

It was seeking the interface between these fields – ideas and activities, materiality and temporality – which led to adoption of Barrett's (2001) 'duality of structure' framework. Barrett's (2001, 155) emphasis upon practice breaks down divisions between thought and action, regarding cultural particulars, including use of architectural space, as expressive of ways in which agents find their place within, and act effectively upon, their world. Workspaces do not merely connote, or are constitutive of, a practitioner's role; rather they are also actively manipulated by the healer as a knowledge agent, and implicitly shaped through their histories of performance. These material structural conditions, together with traces of knowledgeable agency and performance, comprise the inhabited conditions which frame and actively facilitate social practice – cuing appropriate healer/client interactions, or referencing biographies of medico-religious activity. Crucially, from an archaeological viewpoint, it is thus these ordered components of knowledge which work to sustain practices through time (Pauketat 2010). However, recursively, such practices subsequently modify the place inhabited according to the agent's particular schemes and strategies (Barrett 2001, 156), impelling a fluid rather than static interpretation.

The outcomes in the following cases are that significant materials in each setting are not included based on their form, but rather by the diverse contexts of social practice in which they are enmeshed through healers' biographies of practice. In particular, material analysis explores ways in which healers' workspaces are regionalised through spatial subdivisions realised by the movement and orientation of people and by the intervention of paths, thresholds and barriers, both physical and intangible (Barrett 2001, 159). Three themes have been selected as especially pertinent for developing this theoretical approach towards medico-religious spaces, past and present: (a) *framing devices* and *focal points*; (b) *paths*; and, (c) *transformation*.

- (a) Any material context can be read as offering a series of *framing devices* and *focal points*. These may enclose spaces, obscure views, restrict access, or they can orientate actions towards particular places, drawing attention, prompting entry. Barrett (2001, 159) argues their fuller significance is based upon, and must be analysed against, the references they make to 'other places and to a wider horizon of values.'
- (b) Any material context will offer a series of *paths* between regions, enabling particular lines of access whilst potentially impeding others. This connotes more than the material stage for movements (Souvatzi 2012, 173). As paths link certain places at the exclusion of others the practice of movement (and those who can perform it) links these places in 'value-laden sequences allowing practitioners to rework those values into their own biographies through the movement of their own body' (Barrett 2001: 160).
- (c) The material context structures the various acts of exchange and *transformation* occurring within a space as such actions are situated within particular regions of the given field. Situated at particular places and at the intersection of different paths, acts and values and objects which help to facilitate them serve not simply as material or bodily requirements of a process, but rather work referentially to situate actions meaningfully.

To explore healers' fluid strategies for acting in their material worlds analysis proceeds discursively, with reference to the themes above. Juxtaposed are Adamu – a *mai-magani* (medicine-man) consulting openly in the company of elders under the shade of his trees and herbs used mainly for curing bodily sicknesses – and Abdallah – a *mai-jinya* (spirit-man) who met clients in strict privacy, ensconced upon his *dutse* (platform/stone) surrounded by esoteric spiritual devices used for religiously-based healing. Each workspace serves as a 'material reservoir or nucleus' for therapeutic practices (Insoll 2007, 142), but contrasts in the ways Inner and Outer layers of specialist knowledge are expressed through physical and intangible regionalisation. Both healers self-identified using their Hausa titles, offering their own definitions of them in English. Such categories are overlapping and loose, they are applied by men speaking second-languages, however across Madina the practices each title indicated were recognised.

Homes as bodies: indigenous conceptions of Inner and Outer spatiality

Asked to describe why certain activities were carried out at different locations within their compounds, Madina's healers repeatedly offered explanations of spatiality and therapeutic practice drawing upon Hausa metaphors of the body – particularly using the terms *ciki* and *jiki*. Hausa ideas of human anatomy and physiology, and by extension theories of natural and spiritual causation, conceive of a body as composed of two layers: an Outer layer (*jiki*) and an Inner core (*ciki*) (Last 2004, 723). The Outer layer is essentially fluid: a permeable membrane through which substances may enter and

leave, the location for sensory experience, the site of multiple entry points into the body proper. The Inner core by contrast is far more solid: entry and exit is restricted, essential qualities are stored and concentrated here. Recurrence of these concepts during interviews on workspaces led to their adoption as a frame of reference for engaging healers on performance spaces widely different in form.

The fuller significance of *ciki* and *jiki* is based upon references to medico-religious beliefs they connote and are entangled with. Murray Last (2004, 723) notes that the *jiki*, the Outer layer of the body, is conceptualised as the site for all social interactions. Popularity and pleasures resonate on the Outer layer, whereas innate characteristics manifest as ‘solids’ located ‘inside’ the *ciki*. *Sammu*’s (witchcraft) substance, ‘the black pebbles’, propensity for evil, and *tasafi*’s (magic) ability all concentrate over time in the Inner core. One’s *ciki* is also the seat of life; in death the solids within liquefy and spill out. Aging is conceived as a gradual change in the constitution of the Outer and Inner parts of the body. Whilst young, one is predominantly fluid and mobile, but with aging there is an incremental drying of the Outer layer; this is why elders become almost all ‘solids’, scarcely mobile but worthy of respect as their being increasingly consists of concentrated *ciki*.

These understandings were expressed in healers’ compounds across Madina through architectural and conceptual regionalisation between Inner and Outer layers of space and associated activities. Most noticeable was differential use of public and private settings when consulting or transforming substances into either herbal or spiritual medicines,



Fig. 8.1. Chief Adamu cooking medicine in the shade of his *dutse*, October 2011 (Source: B. Trevelyan James)

which worked referentially to situate both the knowledge and practice as alternately open or closed. The following case studies present material contexts expressing each set of values through the acts and objects observed there, accounts of the two workspaces illustrating how they shape and are manipulated in individual healers' activities (Barrett 2001, 155). Adoption of a subjective, discursive approach to healers' practices is used to present workspaces as 'lived' or inhabited, whilst themes such as paths, framing devices/focal points and transformations suggest potentially broader perspectives on medico-religious spatiality.

Chief Adamu: openly consulting domestic herbalist

Adamu (57), Chief of the Chamba people in Madina, lives and practices within a large, walled compound found deep in the *zongo*. He arrived in the area over 30 years ago, long before the bustling migrant community present today. Then the compound grounds were surrounded by bush, and the nearest building was a mosque on the main road half a mile away. Now Adamu's compound is at the heart of the *zongo*, sitting in the crux of a busy crossroads, from which the compound proper is entered.

To the right of the entrance sits a raised concrete platform, covered with a grass and palm room. This is Adamu's *dutse* (stone/platform): his primary consultation and workspace (see Fig. 8.1). Its open architectural style and location directly at the compound entrance make the *dutse* a very public setting. Indeed Adamu frequently shared the shade of the canopy with his sons and visiting elders, even whilst meeting with clients. The open nature of Adamu's *dutse* provided a marked contrast to those of many other Madina healers – it exists architecturally and conceptually on the Outer layer of the compound (*jiki*).

The *dutse* itself occupies the shaded south-west corner of the compound, behind which is a private bathing area. Across the southern half of the site was built the extended family's living quarters. Behind this structure, abutting the south wall runs a shaded alley, serving primarily to carry run-off water from bathing and cooking. In this cool space, and along similar damp spots behind the water tank along the west wall, grow the shrubs and trees which make up Adamu's herb garden (see Fig. 8.2). Though few in number these plants were carefully curated. Growing anything in the thin soil and concrete of the *zongo* is an achievement, and their importance as a focal point for healing practice is explored later.

On a day-to-day basis the compound was a busy environment. Women of the extended family cooked and washed along the residency walkway and around the water tank in the western portion of the compound. Livestock roamed the central yard and sheltered southern alleyway. Frequent visitors came and went through the west gate, young girls fetching water from the well, older community members coming to sit in the shade of

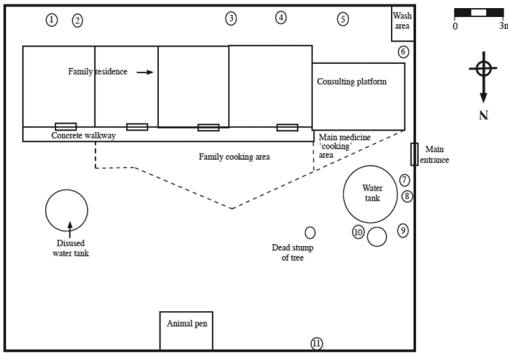


Fig. 8.2. Plan of Adamu's compound showing significant features. In particular note, (i) the consulting platform or *dutse*, (ii) the shared medicine and cooking area and, (iii) the numbered spots which represent the plants making up Adamu's 'herb garden' (Source: B. Trevelyan James). See Figure 8.3 for details of the plant species.

Adamu's platform to pass the time. In the middle of such public, communal life Adamu performed his role as healer and prepared his herbal cures; the material context, shaped by his history of practice, facilitating and defining his effective action as a practitioner of domestic plant remedies dealing with natural ailments (Barrett 2001, 157).

The consulting platform (*dutse*)

Dutse is the term Madina's Hausa-speaking healers use to refer to the bounded space in which they meet clients and prepare their medicines. Within healers' workspaces the *dutse* serves, and comes into being, as a region for medico-religious activities. Adamu's consisted of a raised concrete plinth 4×3.5 m, shaded by a thatched palm roof. Access to the platform was from the northern lip, as the shorter sides were abutted to the east by the family residence and to the west came close to the compound wall edge. Behind, the southern lip opened out to the bathing area and alleyway at the rear of the residence. Depending upon the time of day and position of the sun, Adamu sat with his back to either the southern or eastern edge of the platform. From this focal position he could immediately greet visitors entering via the adjacent gate in the west wall. Elders visiting the compound sat along the west and east sides of the *dutse*, whilst clients coming for a consultation would be situated opposite Adamu on the northern portion, this act marking their transition into the patient role (Barrett 2001, 159).

The *dutse* served multiple, fluid purposes. A living area in which Adamu took meals and met with guests. A site of prayer when the platform was cleared and mats laid at appropriate points in the day. It was also the stage for Adamu's performance as *mai-magani*. With each use, the material configuration of the *dutse* changed: chairs were added and removed; visitors shuffled round so each could find a position out of the sun; *wudu* (ritual cleansing) carefully completed at proper times to sanctify the place for *salah* (formal prayer) (Joll 2012, 122).

The most important features though were those associated with healing activities.

Adamu kept a small stool in front of him on which sat recently used substances and around him were laid out the plastic tubs, containers and bags storing semi-prepared ingredients. Most days a grinding stone with pulpy residues of freshly ground leaves and lime juice remained from earlier medicine preparation, whilst other key tools, such as pestle and mortar and pots, were kept at the south lip of the platform, close to hand. Thus, the *dutse* was at once a site of consultation and preparation, a storage area, and a stage framing casual display of healing activities. It is such fluid rather than static ordering which this chapter emphasises in interpreting the materiality of medico-religious practices; particular spaces having multiple meanings in shifting contexts of social practice (Pearson and Richards 1994, 30; Souvatzi 2012, 182).

Adamu restricted regular clients to Saturday visits to minimise imposition on his time. On these days the *dutse* would be cleared, becoming explicitly a curative field, seats arranged around the edge for waiting patients and a partition screen erected in the south-west corner. Seated clients were typically elderly stroke sufferers and their relatives, there for therapeutic massage. As a stroke is locally considered a very powerful sickness, the presence of such patients attested to Adamu's ability – they sat in silent testimony to the *'karfi* (strength) of his medicines. Such intermingling of clients was not generally observed with other healers, but was permissible due to Adamu's position as a long-serving, leading community member of significant social standing.

Interpretively, the openness and public nature of Adamu's consultations was partly a reflection of the perceived provenance of the ailments patients came to him for. Most were believed to be suffering from natural, bodily sicknesses which, whilst often severe, were not as dangerous or potentially shameful as ailments with a spiritual cause were considered to be. Indigenous beliefs surrounding natural problems do not call for the secrecy or delicacy often prescribed for spiritual issues, although there was still a level of knowledge restriction (Giday *et al.* 2010, 83). Such bodily sicknesses are sicknesses afflicting the Outer layer (*jiki*) of the body, caused by imbalances of fluids or dietary issues (Greenwood 1992, 289–295). Hence, Adamu's consulting space in the Outer layer of the compound was considered culturally appropriate by the *zongo* clientele for the type of healing he performed. Furthermore, through open and public discussion of physical ailments, sufferers had an opportunity to make known their problems, and thus access the informal support and charity of their neighbours; indeed, often opinions were actively sought and shared between those present. This process stands in marked contrast to the more guarded practice of the *mai-jinya* (spirit man) who internalised therapeutic ruminations and whose workspaces were laid out in a correspondingly restrictive fashion.

Home as the centre of medicine production for domestic herbalists

Adamu explained that this openness to his practices, the lack of spatial restrictions or concealment, was a consequence of his origins as, fundamentally, a self-taught, domestic herbalist. Although *mai-magani* had been in his lineage, Adamu received no formal apprenticeship or initiation. Following the death of his father he became the family headman and found dealing with sickness fell to him. Thus, over time he began to master plant remedies learned from others and of his own invention:

In your own house you should take precaution to make medicines. As a young man I had to do this for my own family. It was through such necessity I began to learn the craft of the healer. All my cures were for my own house, but when others saw they were good then they began to come. (Adamu 17/09/10)

Unlike more professional practitioners in the study, Adamu started as, and in outlook fundamentally remains, a domestic healer. He did not consider his medicines to be an intrinsic part of himself in the sense that they had no direct ancestral basis – Adamu learnt his remedies through exchange of knowledge or at a fixed price. The result was that he did not value his medicines as an integral family tradition, or *boka* (secrets), which had to be kept internalised and hidden (Stock 1981, 364); they were not the provenance of *ciki*, one's Inner core. Instead, Adamu valued his abilities as a blessing from Allah to be shared at little cost with the wider community: the domain of *jiki*, the Outer layer of experience and exchange (Last 2004, 723). This belief was enacted in Adamu's willingness to share preparation instructions with clients. Materially, it was also referenced in the public production of medicines upon his open *dutse*, and in the contents of the herb garden, a framing device signifying the plants foundational to his natural curative approach.

Aside from the open *dutse*, which has been discussed in some depth to emphasise its contrast with the far more private space of Abdallah in the following case, these carefully maintained plants were the other significant healing focal point. This floral aspect is important not simply because it was a rare feature in the *zongo*. Rather, to Adamu they supported and reflected integral aspects of his identity as herbalist – the plants themselves valued in terms which stressed 'the symbolic as well as the functional' (Pearson and Richards 1994, 2).

Signifying a herbalist's role: Adamu's plants as material and symbolic resource

Urban healers of the *zongo* face greater challenges accessing fresh floral substances than do their counterparts operating in a village setting. Most research participants travelled substantial distances to find suitable gathering locations, whilst substances from different environmental zones had to be acquired either from contacts in their region of origin

or via specialist suppliers at the markets. Urban restrictions on space meant Adamu was rare among the participants in maintaining a garden. Only well-established, successful practitioners, such as the Agbo clan, who oversaw a Ewe Earth God shrine several kilometres away on the outskirts of Accra Mall, had a comparable resource.

Inventory of Adamu's plants is therefore of interest, given the considerable effort involved in their cultivation. Adamu's small garden consisted of 11 trees, shrubs and grasses (see Fig. 8.3), which through selection and placement had become part of the inhabited material conditions of the compound architecture (Norberg-Schulz 1971, 37). Each plant had been carefully chosen on the basis of its curative properties; thus the garden's contents reflected the species constituting the most important tools in his personal pharmacopeia. They were both traces of knowledgeable agency and actively facilitated strategies of healing practice (Barrett 2001, 156). Whilst Adamu emphasised that when picking herbs to prepare medicine he always prayed to Allah to give the substances power, he had innate respect for the plants themselves – a belief manifested in the planting choices. For a fuller analysis of Adamu's herbs, their uses and associated beliefs, as well as significance of species which are botanically exotic (i.e. of non-African origin) see Trevelyan James (forthcoming).

The centrality of the compound plants to his success as a *mai-magani* was an issue Adamu explicitly discussed in relation to the 'the man's medicine' tree, *Wahlenbergia perrottetii* (*Cephalostigma perrottetii*): 'If this plant could talk so you should hear, then the plant would say, "It is I who am the Doctor." The plant would say, "It is I who am the healer."' (Adamu 17/09/10).

Adamu explained the plant was ascribed male gender because of its associations with notions of action and strength, capable within medicines of 'a deal of work from the flowers, to the leaves, to the roots.' These were traits Adamu connected to his role as *mai-magani*, and so, in a sense, the tree referenced a wider horizon of values framing his healing identity, as a proficient herbalist capable of drawing upon the 'spirit of the plant'. By planting this comparatively large tree directly behind the south-west portion of the *dutse*, all healing consultations were thus carried out in its shade, the leaves and branches framing Adamu's seated presence. Throughout the interview process Adamu referenced the tree's symbolic power to emphasise that his curative ability was founded upon appropriate usage of the 'spirit' of such plants, known in Hausa as *kurya*. This narrative, accompanied by a glance over his shoulder or a rubbing of the leaves, was also observed during the consultations themselves, the *Ochanch-n-ogya* [Chamba] a reassuring presence drawn upon during moments of thought and reflection.

For Adamu then, the garden served a dual purpose. The curated species served as material requirements of his healing process, providing a reserve of accessible raw materials and an illustrative resource for showing clients the species they needed to gather themselves when preparing their own medicines. Also, implicitly, Adamu's herbs

<i>Plant no. and Latin name*</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Vernacular name(s)</i>	<i>Local name(s)</i>	<i>Medicinal purpose</i>
(1) <i>Citrus sinensis</i>	(Rutaceae)	Orange tree	Bàbbán lèè múú [Hausa]	Fever remedy; genital cleansing; stomach aches
(2) Indeterminate, leaves eaten by goats	–	–	Swaka (Hausa) tree	–
(3) <i>Annona senegalensis</i> var. <i>senegalensis</i>	(Annonaceae)	Wild custard apple	Mother's Medicine, Gúbdúú [Hausa]	Pain relief; piles; snake bites; stomach aches
(4) <i>Wahlenbergia perrottetii</i> (<i>Caphalostigma perrottetii</i>)	(Campanulaceae)	–	The Man's Medicine	Many uses; pain relief; stroke
(5) <i>Nicotiana rustica</i> , <i>N. tabacum</i>	(Solanaceae)	Tobacco	Taba [Hausa]	Coughs
(6) <i>Wahlenbergia perrottetii</i> (<i>Petalostigma perrottetii</i>)	(Campanulaceae)	–	The Man's Medicine	See (4)
(7) <i>Annona senegalensis</i> var. <i>senegalensis</i>	Annonaceae)	Wild custard apple	Mother's Medicine, Gúbdúú [Hausa]–	See (3)
(8) <i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>	(Poaceae)	Lemon grass	–	Fever remedy
(9) <i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>	(Poaceae)	Lemon grass	–	See (8)
(10) <i>Moringa oleifera</i>	(Moringaceae)	Horseradish tree, Moringa	Zóógálé	Many uses; stroke
(11) <i>Moringa oleifera</i>	(Moringaceae)	Horseradish tree, Moringa	Zóógálé	See (11)

(‘–’ denotes unknown.)

*Identifications provided by Mr Daniel Abbiw, Herbarium, University of Ghana, Legon

Fig. 8.3. Table of plant species referring to Figure 8.2. (Source: B. Trevelyan James)

worked referentially to symbolise his particular healing identity. By seating himself in the shade of the ‘Man’s medicine’ tree Adamu visually referenced the source of his powers as a herbalist: powerful plants and, implicitly, the *kurya* or ‘spirit of the plant’.

In the next case attention turns to the workspace of Abdallah, a spiritualist who likewise signified the sources of his efficacy through the layout of materials around his consultation area. However, Abdallah regarded himself as a *mai-jinya* (spirit man), and as such his material choices and use of space contrast with the open, public practices

of Adamu. For Abdallah, the ideal consultation area was a highly regionalised one, in which privacy and restriction could be maintained. The result was an internal spatiality marked by paths of exclusion only he could move through, thereby working values of the hidden and unknown into his biography of practice. The material context which follows thus offers insight into an approach to *magani* operating within the *ciki*, the Inner core – expressed through ritual boundaries and the physical division of space as means for influencing perception of place and identity (Irvine *et al.* 2012, 92).

Abdallah: Itinerant *mai-jinya*

Abdallah (50), born in northern Ghana but a member of the Mossi ethnic group with roots in Burkina Faso, was a recent arrival in Madina, having only lived at his present home for three months when contacted in 2010. By the second 2011 period of fieldwork he had moved his family on again to Ghana's second city, Kumasi. Thus, his residence in Madina proved only to be temporary. As such, the adaptation of his rented quarters to a space suitable for his practices as a *mai-jinya* was marked by a number of compromises. From a research perspective, Abdallah's situation presented a classic case of the itinerant West African healer (Stock 1981, 365) – one who journeyed frequently between different *zongo* communities laden with his wares, seeking to swiftly re-establish his practices at each new location. This was achieved, in part, through active manipulation of the material conditions framing his therapeutic interactions.

During 2010, Abdallah resided in a light industrial zone on Madina's outskirts, where inexpensive accommodation housed many recent migrants to Accra. After years of travelling back and forth to the capital from the north, the decision to move his family was based on hopes that permanent settlement might allow him to expand his trade and reputation as a healer. The loose constellation of compounds in which he rented a single 20 m square room was owned by a Hausa landlord, whose other tenants included families from across West Africa. Unlike Adamu then, Abdallah did not have his own exterior space. Rather, the wider compound plot was shared between all the residents (see Fig. 8.4).

Abdallah's room was part of a block of four lodgings bounding the compound to the north side. Each room came with a small patch of reserved concrete walkway onto which the main door opened, and these faced out upon the communal yard; the women's cooking and washing area. To the north-east corner of the yard ran a narrow alley, zigzagging from the main road through a maze of buildings, which served as the entry to the compound. The south-west edge was demarcated by animal pens subsequently found to be the place Abdallah stored desiccating sacrificial remains, a practice repeated by other practitioners around the outskirts of their properties. On the south side the communal plot was open, offering a view of a small, semi-constructed mosque (misaligned to Mecca), adjacent

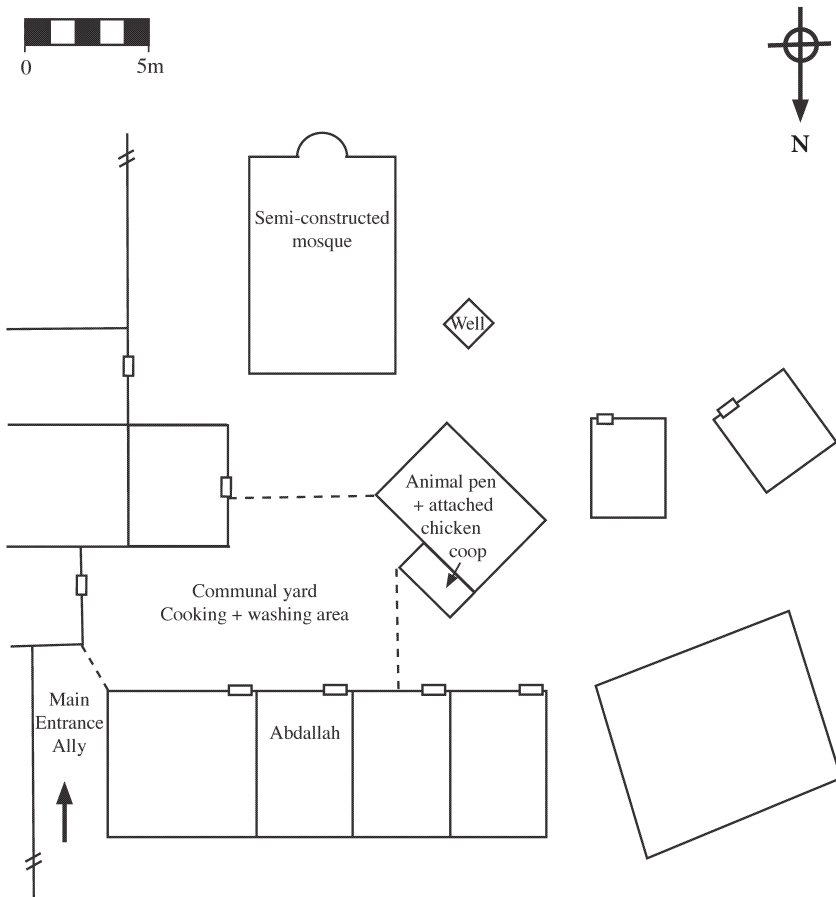


Fig. 8.4. Plan of compound in which Abdallah rented a room, showing significant features. Note particularly: (i) Abdallah's living space; (ii) chicken coop on which Abdallah stored faunal remains from sacrifices (Source: B. Trevelyan James)

to which was the compound well. A line of further residencies ran up parallel to the mosque, marking out the east side of the sprawling site, whilst to the west a scattering of raised, wooden stand-alone huts housed further families.

Given these features, the site of Abdallah's residency was neither private, nor was his personal space significantly bounded. He possessed no acknowledged outdoor workspace, nor was there any way clients could visit or wait for him discreetly. Furthermore, neighbours could not be restricted from approaching his room, and much to Abdallah's discomfort they often inquisitively followed his activities. Overall this crowded, rented, communal setting was anathema to the prescribed secrecy essential to the delicate practices of the *mai-jinya* (Last 1981, 390), Abdallah frequently lamenting

that a *mallam* (learned man) of his status and lineage should find himself in such a situation. Importantly, as a consequence, he took great care in the presentation of his inner workspace, marking out idealised transitions between ‘inside/outside, sacred/profane, female/male, public/private’ (Irvine *et al.* 2012, 93). The express purpose of the interior’s material staging was to impress upon those entering that, despite the unfavourable outer context, moving into the presence of the *dutse* one entered a new region of practice: the *ciki*, or Inner core of the *mai-jinya*.

Abdallah’s therapeutic space

Abdallah’s therapeutic space was the most rigidly ordered encountered during the study; a small island where he found his place amongst a void of public and uncontrollable urban landscape (Dovey 1985, 57). This order instilled a clear regionalisation realised through the physical intervention of paths, thresholds and barriers, which in turn served to rank participants (healer/client) and distinguish areas within the space as comparatively ‘open’ or ‘closed’ (Goffman 1969). These general patterns, made particularly evident by the confines of the setting and Abdallah’s desire to ensure the most appropriate stage for exhibiting his healing status, were also indicative of similar spatial strategies followed by other practitioners. In simple terms: spiritualist healers, whether Islamic *mallami* (holymen) or indigenous *mai-jinya*, strived to mark out a division between their zones for work and performance, and family living areas. However, as Pearson and Richards (1994, 5) note, space is a dimension of practice as well as symbolism, thus particular meanings cannot be fixed but rather must be evoked/transformed through the medium of human activity and recurrent usage.

Abdallah actively (re)produced his identity as healer within the context of his workspace in a number of ways. Prior to consultation, performance and display ensured that on entry clients came to be seated in a position of supplication, surrounded by Abdallah’s accoutrements, whilst he occupied the *dutse*. This focal point presented both a place of action and exhibition, occupancy signalling access and control of the medicine assemblage, referencing the numinous forces such materials served to embody and mediate with. As a setting, Abdallah’s workspace thus facilitated not only the material requirements of his healing practices, but also worked referentially, pointing to other places and a wider horizon of values which situated these actions meaningfully (Barrett 2001, 160).

Rappaport (1988, 718) notes environments are thought before they are enacted. Given Abdallah’s recent arrival in his small home the planning behind carefully locating each region for activities and objects had yet to be blurred by prolonged inhabitation. Abdallah made it clear that an overarching concept structuring use of the residence was the maintenance of divisions between public and private areas, the values of which

were realised by people's movement through them on a series of paths. At times these divisions were invisible or idealised – Abdallah's private space was sometimes overrun by small children – however, in moments such as the performance of consultation or divination, restrictions crystallised. For instance, when inviting a client to sit at his *dutse*, through evoking the cultural artefact of this term, the space is transformed into a delineated *place*; meaning, based on tradition, is created and these meanings then serve to mediate participants' actions (Irvine *et al.* 2012, 102). Family members know not to enter, stopping and waiting at threshold points, the behaviour of clients accessing this value laden region is suitably cued to show the proper reverence and respect.

In Abdallah's workspace, the construction and maintenance of such zones took on a sequentiality from the open, public setting of the compound's communal yard, through a series of small but carefully defined spaces associated with different aspects of his healing role (see Fig. 8.5). Each presaged increasing levels of privacy, leading to the restricted portion accommodating Abdallah's *dutse*. The sanctity of this rear part of the room was rigorously enforced by numerous prohibitions; Hawa, his wife, could not enter it as the presence of a menstruating female would weaken the medicines' power, nor would it be proper for a Christian or non-believer to touch items associated with Islamic practices, as similar pollution might occur. Only Abdallah could move through these places, thereby reworking their values of access, secrecy and power into his own biography of practice.

Pathways from public to private, marking transition from accessible to restricted, were visually signified by physical boundaries and regions of activity. At the porch area one entered a liminal space between the public and private zones of the outer compound and inner layers of the home, the door serving as the threshold between the two. At the entrance to the room were placed the tools and bottles used to prepare commercial plant medicines, sold door-to-door around Madina. This herbal medicine, a panacea for natural ailments, belongs to a comparatively open field of practice, the concoctions representing a widely available, externalised brand of healing: the cure-all. As such, their position in the Outer layer (*jiki*) of Abdallah's workspace is consistent with cosmological values loosely structuring medico-religious activity spaces throughout the study area.

Moving fully into the room, further partition was achieved between Abdallah's consultation and workspace, and the secluded living portion of the house, divided by a curtain strung from the middle across the length of the home. To the eastern side, furthest from the entrance, Abdallah's wife and young daughter had the necessary seclusion for sleeping and bathing, these profane activities divided by the thin fabric of the screen curtain from the sacred *dutse*. A long wooden bench divided the healing area in half again, separating the reception and medicine preparation area from the private sanctum for spiritual performance: Abdallah's *dutse*.

The *dutse* itself occupied the room's north-west quarter, framed by the back wall to

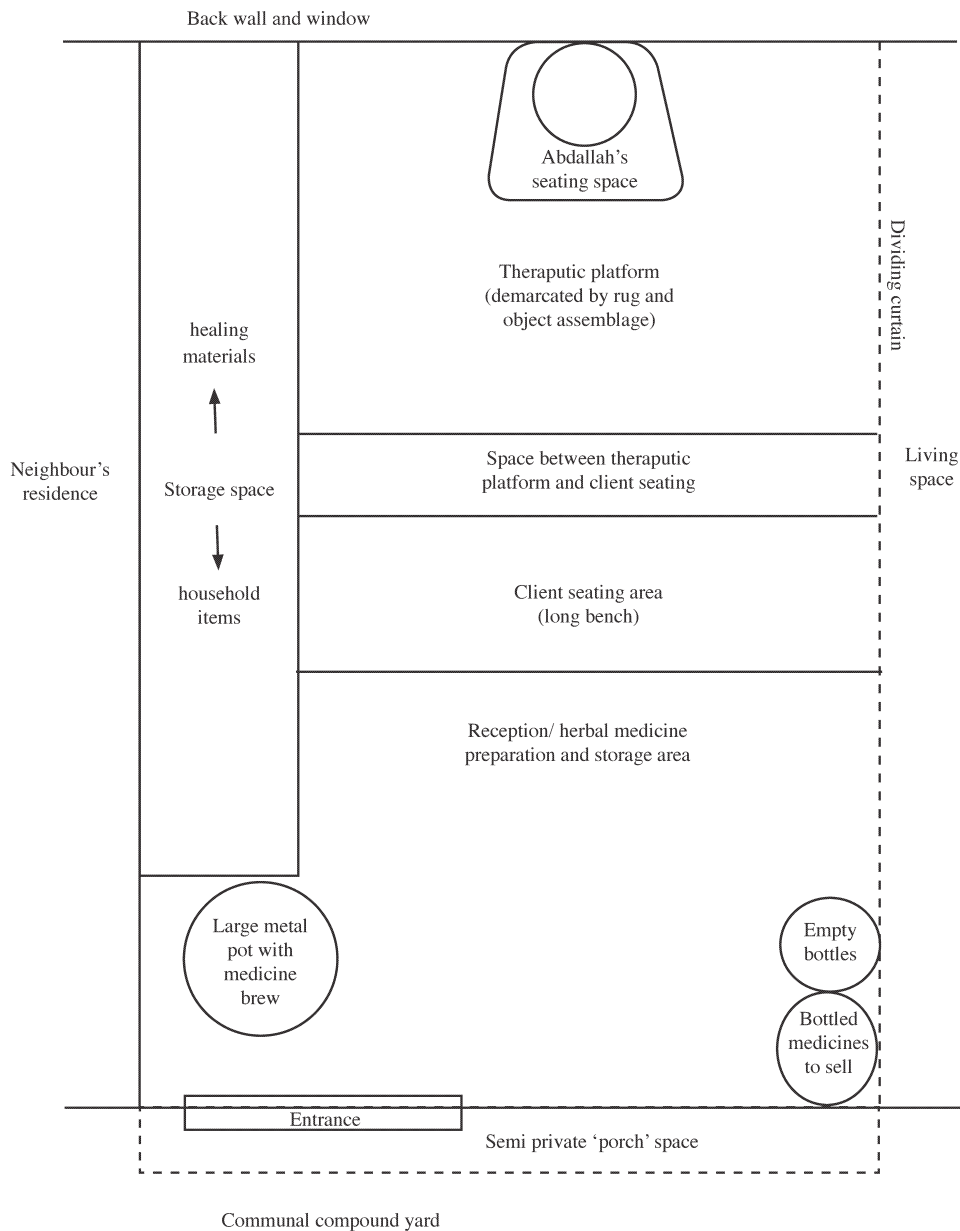


Fig. 8.5. Simplified plan of the spatial arrangement of Abdallah's *dutse*, highlighting features discussed in the text. Note the sequential organisation of the workspace, the ordering of materials in space, and the threshold points which together serve to mark the transition from mundane to sacred as one enters for consultation (Source: B. Trevelyan James)

the north into which a window was set, at times the light silhouetting Abdallah, so only the outlines of his features could be seen. Along the west wall, offering convenient access, were stored the bulkier herbal substances and practical tools of the healer's trade, whilst the eastern side was fixed by the curtain partition. The bench across the south side of the *dutse* enclosed it, serving to physically and performatively separate the more open reception and herbal medicine preparation area from the closed and private northern portion of the room, in which Abdallah took audience with his clients.

Abdallah's *dutse*: Tools of a *mai-jinya*

The therapeutic platform was physically demarcated by a woven rug and careful positioning of objects and substances utilised in Islamic and indigenous spiritual medicines. Observations during 2010 fieldwork proved that this ordering was essentially dynamic and reflexive (Pearson and Richards 1994, 2) – a considered but spontaneously evolving arrangement supporting creative healing activities. The gap between the visitor seating area and the *dutse* proper created as a physical boundary between the practitioner and the client. However, it was Abdallah's almost overwhelming display of objects which served most clearly to mark out his position and status as a healer of '*karfi* (strength), ensconced in the seat of his power. Whereas Adamu, rooted firmly in Madina, surrounded himself with his patients and plants, Abdallah set his stage with portable *materia medica*. Figures 8.6 and 8.7 show a momentary picture of the constellation of materials.

Abdallah stated a *mai-jinya* could practice effectively anywhere as long as they had the necessary tools of their trade. These materials, and the medico-religious knowledge they embody, represent the intrinsic abilities of the spiritual therapist. His *dutse*, and the assemblage exhibited upon it, thus referenced what he believed and sought to convey to be the *ciki*, or Inner core, of his personal tradition of inherited numinous power. To a visiting client the layout of materials was intended to both awe and signify the wider range of therapies on offer. At the same time, specific objects intimate the possibilities of further, deeper strands of unorthodox practice, such as *sammu* (sorcery) and *sambo* (bad medicine), kept hidden and concealed from more casual visitors (Lewis Wall 1988, 138–139).

Analysis of individual objects and practices is beyond the scope of this chapter but is provided elsewhere (Trevelyan James 2014a; 2014b). Here, it suffices to note Abdallah organised his assemblage into loose spatial subdivisions, clumps, referencing fields of Islamic and indigenous religion, and herbalism. Reflecting his role as a Muslim and heir to *mallami* tradition, items associated with Islamic techniques were directly in front of his seat, including a prominently displayed Qur'an and numerous *tasbaa* (prayer beads) used for recounting nightly repetitions of prayer. These prayers were the most important



Fig. 8.6. The assemblage of a *mai-jinya*. Abdallah's tools, medicines, and ritual objects as they were typically organised on his consulting platform (Source: B. Trevelyan James). See Figure 8.7 for details of the numbered items.

practice carried out at the *dutse* and are returned to later. Across the western portion of the platform were more esoteric materials belonging to practices outside the bounds of orthodox Islamic spirituality, associated with indigenous *mai-jinya* rather than the *mallam*, though there is really no strict division (Last 1992, 397). Here, to Abdallah's right-hand, are kept animal parts and substances. Guinea fowl heads for divination; putrid cow's milk used in the warding off of spirits. Intermingled are man-made objects used in rites: the ball of twine with its hidden core for wishing into; padlocks used in the closing of court cases; packets of pins, symbolic of the ability to cure chronic, piercing sickness.

Aside from the spiritual accoutrements there were also Abdallah's bundles of plants, roots and barks. Used for both herbal and spiritual therapies, these had been brought with him from the north. Their presence referenced the highly valued *magani* (medicine) of the distant savannah bush land of northern Ghana and beyond (Konadu 2007, 80). Together, each grouping of material was intermingled, both in terms of physical layout and underlying beliefs and concepts, signifying the different fields of healing practice from which Abdallah drew his *'karfi* (strength). In this respect, the *dutse* can be

No.	Description	Purpose
1	Grinding stone	Practical tool and ritual item.
2	Guinea fowl feathers	Ritual application of medicines.
3	Cushions, mats & rugs	Abdallah's seat.
4	<i>Tasbaa</i> (prayer beads), multiple	Counting out repetitions of prayer.
5	Writing boards, multiple	Producing written charms.
6	<i>Rubutu</i> ink	Producing written charms.
7	Quran	Islamic prayer.
8	Client notebooks	Both a record and proof of large client base.
9	Pens for literary medicine/divination	Used during divination performances.
10	Notes from divination performances	Used during divination performances.
11	<i>Daddawa</i> bark (<i>Parkia biglobosa</i>)	Herbal and spiritual medicines.
12	<i>Zaanga</i> bark (<i>Erythrophleum ivorense</i>)	Herbal and spiritual medicines.
13	Tree substances from northern Ghana	Herbal and spiritual medicines.
14	Dried herbs from northern Ghana	Herbal and spiritual medicines.
15	Native fowl's egg	Multiple uses, esp. bad medicine.
16	Perfume – 'Onalia'	Worn during spiritual intercessions.
17	Bag of metal pins	Symbolic of ability to cure chronic sickness.
18	<i>Vulunvu dogo</i> (earthen insect nest)	Multiple uses, esp. bad medicine.
19	'The ball of twine'	For wishing and cursing.
20	Guinea fowl head	To call loved ones home.
21	Ewe's milk (putrid)	To ward off spirits.
22	Torches	To light night time ritual performances.
23	Bottles of prepared medicine	Commercial medicine, cure-all.
24	Gourd bowl	Practical tool and ritual item.
25	Mobile phones, multiple	Essential tool of the contemporary healer.
26	Knife	Practical tool.
27	Honey	Associated with positive spiritual medicines.

Fig. 8.7. Assemblage of a *mai-jinya*. Descriptions of numbered items in Figure 8.6. (Source: B. Trevelyan James)

interpreted as a reservoir for ritual action – its intersection of acts, values and objects being both a reserve of material and an embodiment of the potentiality for healing performance (Insoll 2007, 142).

Spiritual practices, privacy and power

The primary healing performance enacted upon Abdallah's *dutse* was nightly sessions of *dua*, a form of repetitive prayer counted out in privacy upon the *tasbaa*, used to empower combinations of materials for crafting into ritual objects. As with the many of Abdallah's spiritual activities, prohibition dictated this be performed after midnight, in conditions of seclusion and secrecy. Abdallah explained seclusion was necessary for

initiating communion with the spiritual forces enlisted to support his practices, whilst secrecy empowers the activity by mirroring the image of the spirit world. The spirit world is invisible to that of man, so those seeking to achieve intercessions through the supernatural must do so (ideally) in a manner which is invisible to the world of man also (Danfulani 1999, 422). Finally, as with many of the healers, privacy was necessitated by a desire for secrecy, framed both by a pragmatic concern for guarding trade secrets and indigenous religious belief in that which is hidden possessing greater power (Last 1992, 400).

Although practitioners could instruct patients in the mode of treatment for ‘normal’ physiological ailments affecting the *jiki* (Outer layer), knowledge concerning spiritual problems afflicting the *ciki* (Inner core) was valued only when highly controlled (Stock 1981, 365). Whilst *mai-magani* like Adamu showed patients the substances and techniques necessary to cure bodily complaints, clients suffering problems with a spiritual cause received little or no explanation of the activities taken to bring resolution on their behalf. Juxtaposing these types of cases reveals interesting divisions between openness and secrecy of knowledge exchange concerning healing practices and ways this is referenced spatially/performatively in medico-religious material contexts (see Fig. 8.8).

<i>Jiki</i> (Outer layer)	<i>Ciki</i> (Inner core)
‘Normal’ ailments.	‘Spiritual’ issues.
Openness.	Secrecy.
Preparation during the day.	Preparation during the night.
Knowledge about the exact treatment process may be explicitly explained to the client.	Knowledge about the exact treatment process generally remains extremely restricted from the client.
Preparation of the materials used in the therapy may be prepared in public areas of the compound. Preparation spaces generally multi-use, e.g. cooking/reception areas.	Preparation of materials used in the therapy predominantly prepared in interior, private spaces. These preparation spaces often have explicit taboos and restrictions associated with them – demarcated for specialist use.
Substances and objects used in the treatment of normal ailments may be stored/prepared openly.	Substances and objects used for spiritual activities may have to be kept from view or even stored in a ‘hidden’ place.
Treatments for ‘normal’ issues are often learned through knowledge exchange between peers. Horizontal exchange.	Treatments for ‘spiritual’ issues are often learned through knowledge exchange within lineage groups – primarily inherited knowledge. Vertical exchange

Fig. 8.8. Table detailing a comparison between therapies associated with Outer and Inner fields of healing practice (Source: B. Trevelyan James)

Framed within Giddens' (1982; 1985) 'structuration theory', these findings indicate ways indigenous concepts of Inner and Outer spatiality may be one element shaping the simultaneously effective and expressive inhabited material conditions of healers' social practices. Barrett's (2001) theories of the material contexts of agency and practice add nuance, encouraging attention to on-going shaping and manipulation of these places, as sites like preparation and consulting spaces fluidly shift in meaning through dialectical relationships with human action. As in the examples above, divisions between such thoughts and practical action are thereby broken down in the unfolding of material practice – concepts of openness or secrecy and perceived power of a particular region being expressed, enacted and transformed in architecture and movement (Souvatzi 2012, 173). These primary ethnographic findings and theoretical approaches may contribute to a broadening of interpretive perspectives on historic medico-religious spaces; in a closing case potential of this approach is explored through reanalysis of a Hausa migrant 'temple' serving a comparable mixture of indigenous and Islamic medico-religious beliefs

Reinterpreting Hausa medico-religious spaces in the past

Limited resources exist concerning the spatiality of Islamised sacred spaces in West Africa. Heidi Nast's (1996) reconstruction of the Islamic-influenced layout of Kano Palace, northern Nigeria, *c.* 1500, provides a rare example. However, her theoretical framework, marrying critical geographic notions of landscape and spatial praxis with Foucault's (1970; 1973; 1979) notion of 'archaeology', restricts analysis of the palace architecture to the macro scale (Nast 1996: 44). Although the study considers themes relevant to compound spaces in Madina, such as metaphors of the body to delineate inner and outer regions of the Palace household (Nast 1996, 62–65), a lack of detailed room survey limits comparison.

Given these limitations, the most promising case for re-examination thus comes instead from North Africa, where, in Tunisia's capital, Tunis, a *gidan tsafi* (medicine-house) belonging to Hausa migrants was documented by A. J. N. Tremearne (1914, 269–279). Called the *Gidan Kuri* (House of Kuri), this temple, as Tremearne termed it, served as the shrine and meeting place for members of the Bori spirit-possession movement, a cult of affliction linked to appeasement of entities believed to cause disease (see Salamone 1975; Lewis *et al.* 1991; Andersson 2002). If a person fears attack by some illness they will make an offering at the temple; if already ill a cure may be divined from one of the initiates found there. Similar temples exist in Hausa communities across Africa to serve Masu-Bori worshippers (O'Brien 1999, 18), although none were operating in contemporary Madina. Tremearne (1914, 272–273) describes several similar temples, but notes the *Gidan Kuri* was 'the oldest and best in Tunis'. The room's layout is recorded in Figure 8.9, with approximate measurements of $7.5 \times 5.5 \times 3$ m. Like the workspaces

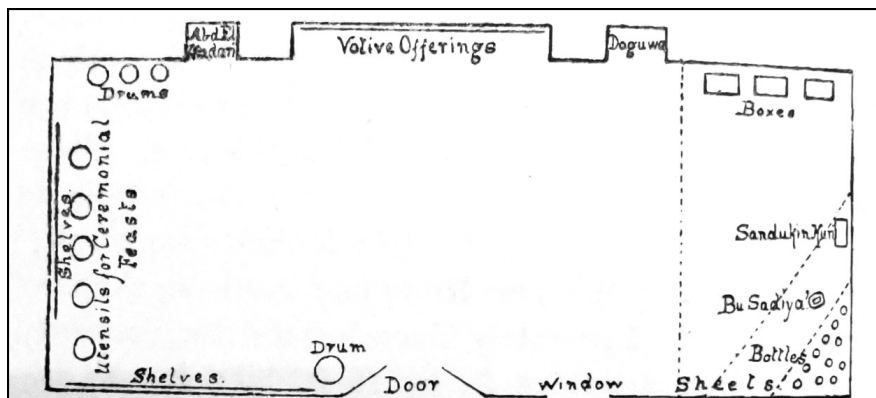


Fig. 8.9. Plan of the *Gidan Kuri*. The special apartment or *daki* ('chapel') of the spirit is curtained off to the right (Source: Tremearne 1914, 270)

of Madina's healers, such dimensions are less important given that the room was rented, and not built specifically for the purposes of the Masu-Bori. Reinterpretation thus focuses upon regionalisation of the space and what may be inferred about attendant fields of medico-religious practice through analysis of framing devices and focal points, paths and transformations (Barrett 2001, 159–160).

Of most interest is Tremearne's description of the inhabited material conditions. In the centre of the room, in a wide recess opposite the door, were shelves holding offerings, as well as the 'trappings' or symbols of individual lesser spirits. To either side of the shelves were smaller recesses housing shrines to an Islamic saint, *Abd El-Qadir*, known colloquially as *Mallam Tsofo*, and to *Doguwa*, an indigenous spirit, containing oil lamps, incense braziers, pestles, and insignia (Tremearne 1914, 270). The shelves also held the principal objects with which possessed initiates performed particular spirits, such as 'a string of prayer-beads and charms and a prayer-board for Mallam Tsofo' (Tremearne 1914, 270). These elements are the characteristic trappings of the *Masu-Bori* (Bori worshippers), brought out during ceremonies and feasts. Spatially and conceptually such offerings and objects exist on the outer layer of the cult, there for all to experience, and thus were placed visibly and centrally within the *Gidan Kuri*. Their focal positioning may therefore be interpreted as referencing the public values of the temple: a syncretic merging of Islamic and indigenous religion.

The most restricted pathways are those through the 'private apartment' of *Kuri*, housed to the right on a raised platform, and screened off by hanging cloth. Described as a 'veritable Holy of Holies', this region was guarded from entry by various prohibitions. It was accessible only by the *Arifa*, the lead priestess who thus worked these values of hidden power and control into her own biography through privileged movement. Tremearne was forbidden to enter on pain of death, but managed to engineer time

alone in the temple to investigate behind the screen after having his wife distract the attendants. An ethically dubious choice by today's perspective, perhaps the warning of the *Arifa* should have been heeded. Tremearne was killed within months of publishing his findings, a casualty of the Great War (Haddon 1915, 432).

Two further white cloths screened the right corner in which symbols of the most powerful spirit was placed. Behind the final sheet were the valuable food offerings to the spirits, bottles of beer and eggs, whilst the second sheet marked out a space for the *sandukan Kuri* (Kuri's box), in which further offerings from the community were locked. Here the economic and sacred value of the temple resided. This Holy of Holies, or *ciki* (Inner Core), was a place of transformation where the secular took on supernatural properties; a point of intersection of different paths, acts, values and objects which worked referentially to situate the power of the temple and the *Arifa* meaningfully. By controlling this space and its contents the *Arifa* supported their ritual legitimacy, a strategy materialised through the practical action of layering physical barriers obscuring entry and visibility.

Beliefs impeding access to the temple's most potent spiritual aspects bear comparison to similar 'traditional values' surrounding closed spaces cited by Madina's practitioners. Like the workspace of Madina spiritualists, such as Abdallah, various prohibitions preserved the purity of the *Gidan Kuri*. No menstruating female attendants were allowed to enter, nor any unclean animals, nor unbelievers. Incense had to be regularly burned and candles lit to keep the spirits welcome (Tremearne 1914, 273). For those performing rites at the temple, taboos had to be observed to avoid offending the spirits, particularly abstinence from alcohol or sex. Indeed much of Tremearne's (1914, 279) description of migrant Hausa medico-religious spatiality and ideology is consistent with practices observed in 21st-century Madina, despite each context being geographically and temporally separate. Even in the comparatively similar cases presented here though, no imposition of direct analogies is sought, the fundamental weakness of such an approach having been comprehensively critiqued (*e.g.* Wylie 1982; 1985). Instead, the brief discussion above indicates the interpretive potential of broadening understandings of past healing and ritual spaces accessible through reference to present spatial practices, a direction it is hoped may be refined and expanded upon in future.

Conclusion

Examples of practices and beliefs from one context can never be applied with any certainty to another. However, it is hoped that this paper has provided some alternate interpretive perspectives on the spatiality of medico-religious practitioners operating within the broad paradigms of West African indigenous and Islamic medical cultures. Certainly, primary ethnography with healers themselves, particularly close analysis

of the materiality of their workspaces, has offered insight into some of the ways material conditions are simultaneously shaped by, constituting of, and manipulated, in practitioners' roles. Archaeologically, framing these findings within Barrett's (2001) reading of agency and practice theory, suggests evidence of the material structural conditions of past healing spaces can provide interpretive access to attendant fields of medico-religious social practice. Importantly though, this study has sought to move beyond the objectification of healing knowledge in material patterns. Instead, it argues that the significance of materials in the medico-religious settings explored is represented not by form, but rather by the discursive, day-to-day contexts of social, medicinal and religious practice in which they are enmeshed.

Study of contemporary healers' workspaces has led to critique of dominant archaeological readings of African ritual settings and assemblages as implicitly static – a notion increasingly challenged in recent archaeological literature – presenting instead a more fluid, inhabited reading. The study has also raised issues concerning the possibilities of non-Western concepts for accessing alternate interpretations, links between individuals' biographies of materiality and practice and their effective agency, and questions how these fields may be made amenable to investigation and enquiry. This chapter sought only to tentatively raise these issues, its intent primarily being to present preliminary findings which it is hoped may be addressed in more detail during future research.

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‘The Little Mannie with his daddy’s horns’

A. J. N. W. Prag

This article is dedicated to the memory of Tony Ward who first introduced me to ‘the Little Mannie with his daddy’s horns’, in grateful thanks.

During 1974, while I was collecting material for an exhibition at Manchester Museum on ‘Celtic’ stone heads, Tony Ward – a schoolmaster whose family stemmed from the Glossop area, and whose local knowledge and local contacts rendered him an enthusiastic mine of information on matters both Celtic and Glossopian – told me of a small figure that had recently been found in the area: he said that it was of a size and form similar to heads that were still, or at any rate recently, carved and used in the area, especially on shepherds’ crooks, and he speculated that it represented the Celtic shepherd god Cernunnos, the ‘Lord of the Animals’. We never saw the figure itself, but he supplied the Museum with photographs which showed a grotesque figure with a massive head endowed with a beaky face and mouth, massive protruding almondshaped eyes, and what appeared to be horns that sprouted from the top of the head and curved down its side, not unlike those of a ram; in the top of the head was a hollow perhaps 1 cm across. The trunk appeared to be cylindrical, with stumpy arms (Figs 9.1–9.3). Medical colleagues to whom I showed the photographs saw the oversized head as an indication of anencephaly: however, later discoveries proved this to be a false lead.

Such was the interest and the amount of information engendered by this exhibition that the Museum decided to set up a register of information received on all such heads to the west of the Pennines, to complement that begun by Sidney Jackson at Cartwright Hall Museum in Bradford for those on the east side: in fact it had been a suggestion of Jackson’s that had inspired Dr David Owen, then director of the Manchester Museum, to initiate the exhibition in the first place (S. Jackson, *Celtic and Other Stone Heads*, Shipley, 1973: Jackson’s inventory is now owned by Yorkshire Archaeological Society (ref. MS1277)). Gradually this extended to a full survey, undertaken on behalf of the Museum by Martin Petch (appointed Honorary Research Associate for the purpose). The survey became an active one, with Martin Petch seeking information through the press and through approaches to other museums, and as Jackson’s health failed its range was extended eastwards so that the groundwork he had laid should not be wasted.



Fig. 9.1. 'The Little Mannie with his Daddy's horns', Manchester Museum acc. no. 1987.68 (Source: Photos Manchester Museum, University of Manchester)

The survey brought in more information not only about heads in the Glossop area, but also about the background to their creation and use, information that was sometimes surprising to 20th-century academic minds accustomed to an established Christian church in an industrial or even post-industrial society. Suffice it to say for the present that one discovered that some aspects of the pagan religions have survived, not necessarily very far below the surface; that there are still deeply-held beliefs in the 'Old Ones' of which most incomers have no inkling, except perhaps a salacious and generally inappropriate and misconceived notion of 'witchcraft'.

As we learned about more Celtic heads in the Glossop area, and even acquired several

for the Museum's collection, more information began to come our way about the horned figurine, largely through the good offices of Tony Ward.

The figurine had been found under (or rather in) the cellar floor of the Conservative Club in Hollingworth, north-west of Glossop, by the cleaner, Lucy Healey: she had decided to swab the cellar floor really thoroughly, which proved not to be such a good idea because it was – in part at least – an earth floor. As it dissolved under her ministrations various stones and the like emerged. As she swept them up she noticed that one was not just a lump of stone but a little carved figure, so she took it home with her. It was not strictly hers to keep, but the property of the Conservative Club: however, the secretary of the Club was persuaded not to pursue the matter, since it seemed unlikely that Mrs Healey would let the figure leave Longdendale. Word of the discovery reached Tony Ward whose antiquarian interests as well as his profession of history teacher gave him a lively interest in all such finds, and whose local background made it easier for him to learn of them than would have been possible for an outsider from the University: he and his friend Pat Ellison (or Pat alone), both of them amateur archaeologists, investigated the findspot. They found many traces of activity: around it was a circle of candleholders with white candlestumps or night-lights in them, and inside the circle they found the remains of chicken and hare bones, ivory counters used for scoring at billiards, and other offerings including a 'mother figure' whose head had been broken off accidentally, which Pat kept safely. The statuette was referred to locally as 'the Little Mannie with his daddy's horns'; apparently he had been painted green, the colour of witchcraft – shades of the Green Man – but most of this came off when Mrs Healey scrubbed it, and only traces remain today, particularly on the left eye. According to Tony Ward, the last time the figure had been 'used' was 'for the good of our lads at the Front' in 1916.

Thereafter that particular trail cooled down until the discovery of 'Lindow Man' in 1984, and the interest in matters Celtic which it aroused in the NorthWest (Stead *et al.* 1986; Turner and Scaife 1995; now also *e.g.* Joy 2009). The Museum issued a press release describing the survey of Celtic heads which Martin Petch was carrying out, and asking for information about further heads. Word came from Glossop via Tony Ward that under the right circumstances Mrs Healey might be willing to part with the Little Mannie (and Tony Ward appeared anxious that he should be safe within the confines of a Museum case before the satanists, particularly those in the United States, got wind of him). So one day in January 1986 I arranged to go and see Mrs Healey, and to view the figurine for the first time. The Healeys lived in a council estate on the edge of Tintwhistle: Mrs Healey warned me that the nameboard for the road in which she lived had fallen off, but that I would find it easily enough because it was the last street, and she lived in the last house. I set out from Manchester towards Longdendale and the Woodhead Pass. Tintwhistle is the last village before the road emerges onto the moors for good. That day the snow only lay lightly in Derbyshire (down on the plain in Manchester there had



Fig. 9.2. 'The Little Mannie with his Daddy's horns', Manchester Museum acc. no. 1987.68 (Source: Photos Manchester Museum, University of Manchester)

been none). Mrs Healey had been right – it was easy to find the last house in the last street in the last village. The last house had a makeshift but extremely businesslike gate, and I am sure I remember a sign suggesting one avoided the dog. I entered and rang the bell, which was answered first by a Baskervillian baying, and in due course by Mrs Healey herself. 'It's all right, I'll just let him out, then he'll not worry about you' she said, to put me at my ease, 'Come in'. Whatever she did, the baying became fainter, and the hound and I did not meet.

We sat down at a table in the main room of the house, and Mrs Healey produced the figurine from a small box. He was much smaller than the photographs had led



Fig. 9.3. 'The Little Mannie with his Daddy's horns', Manchester Museum acc. no. 1987.68 (Source: Photos Manchester Museum, University of Manchester)

one to expect; his body was a mere cylindrical stump broken off at the waist, and the arms the same, broken above the elbows although the shoulders were clearly defined; he now stands some 7.5 cm high and the diameter of his trunk measures a little over 3 cm but all the edges are rounded and it seems likely that all the parts of the body were once complete and that the extremities had been lost long ago. The details of the face were naturally much clearer than in the photographs. Though unlike any other 'Celtic' heads that I had seen, in that the face was not triangular, nor flat in profile, but rather resembled a great beak, there were still enough details that recalled 'Celtic' heads, such as the almondshaped eyes and the hollow in the top to allow one to classify it in that rather

nebulous definition. The horns suggested that he was perhaps intended to represent the Celtic god Cernunnos, as Tony Ward had suggested.

Our discussions eventually reached a rather inconclusive end – I made an offer, she ‘would let me know’, but after that I heard no more for a few months and my follow-up enquiries produced no response. Then during the summer Tony Ward telephoned me again to say that the Healeys felt they needed a holiday, and that if I increased our offer somewhat they would probably be willing to part with the figurine. More negotiations followed, by letter and telephone and we agreed on a sum, and a few days later I drove up to Tintwhistle again, accompanied by two student volunteers: one was considering writing a thesis on witchcraft, the other simply came for the ride.

This time the sun was shining, and Mrs Healey herself appeared much more cheerful and outgoing; this time we were even offered tea. Little Mannie was brought out, admired, and formally handed over. We drove back to Manchester, armed with our little box. This was a business trip: I had taken the Museum van, not because of the size of acquisition I was bringing back, but because of insurance rules which forbade me from carrying any ‘goods’ in my own car. Normally I obeyed this rule merely as a technicality, but on this occasion I felt enormously relieved when I turned into the main quadrangle of the University without incident.

Not, perhaps, without good cause. Things began to happen in association with the Little Mannie. We duly entered him in the museum accessions register as no. 1987.68, and put him into the stores with the other ‘Celtic’ sculptures. Preparations began for the first exhibition about Lindow Man. The Keeper of Display went and photographed and measured him. That evening he drove out of the car park, and scraped one side of his car. Next evening he did the same to the other side. All this after 18 years of accident-free driving, he claimed. Other colleagues became more and more wary of the figure. The Keeper of Geology refused to identify the stone from which he was made, saying (truly) that he had suffered enough disasters in the last couple of years as it was. The Director (a former archaeologist and a Lancashire man) refused to have anything to do with the figure.

Because of its very waxy surface the conservators suggested that possibly it was actually made of wax over a stone core and much later Pat Ellison told me in another context that he appeared to turn into wax in her hands as she held him; in any case it seemed worth investigating the ‘wax’ further, so I contacted John Mills, then chief conservator at the National Gallery and the country’s leading specialist in waxes and resins. We arranged that I should bring the figure to London on my next trip south. I duly took him home the evening before, planning to catch an early train to London. That evening someone broke a window of our car as it stood in the drive, but was disturbed before doing any real damage. However, on the train to London far worse followed: when I visited the lavatory on the train, the zip on my trousers not so much jammed as collapsed utterly

(an incident which the *Sun* later reported on p. 3 – naturally – under the headline 'No flies on Little Mannie – Curse rips boss's zip'). I had to sidle into the bookstall at Euston station to buy some safety pins before going to the National Gallery to see John Mills and then on to another meeting.

There were a few further incidents like this later – always in pairs, and rarely worse than mischievous. For example, a year or two later Shelagh Lewis, the colleague with whom I had investigated and collected 'Celtic' heads after that first exhibition in 1974, paid us a visit to study the heads we had acquired since she had left the Museum and moved south. On her way back to her aunt's in Liverpool where she was staying, the pushchair in which she was wheeling the smaller of her two children collapsed in the middle of Lime Street, scattering child and possessions across the road (but without harm); and the bus they eventually caught to the aunt's house took them not by the direct route, but by way of a magical mystery tour of Merseyside. Rather more dramatically, one of the two information officers specially appointed for the second Lindow Man exhibition in 1991 split his head open on a cupboard door during the preparations for the exhibition; and then managed to lock the doors of my car with the keys inside and the engine still running when I delivered him to the casualty department of Manchester Royal Infirmary.

More academic study of the figure by John Mills and others showed that it was entirely of stone (though it took several years before I could find someone willing to identify the stone), and that the waxy surface was merely the result of much handling. It proved very difficult to find any exact parallels in European prehistoric art, but he appeared to rest with so-called 'Celtic' heads and figures, albeit rather uneasily.

Meanwhile Pat Ellison's interest in archaeology had been growing, and one day in 1987, almost exactly a year after my first visit to Mrs Healey, she called to discuss with me ways in which she might take this further formally. I mentioned that we had recently acquired the Little Mannie (which of course she knew already from other sources), and asked if she would like to see him – of course she would, so we fetched him out of his box, and I described how none of us liked him, and how most of my colleagues would have nothing to do with him. Pat reckoned that this was because we did not treat him right, and she would settle him for us. So we took him back to my office, and while we discussed Pat's plans for studying, and some aspects of the figurine's history, she held him in a fold of her pullover and gently stroked him. At one point the Keeper of Display came into the room, but when he saw a lady sitting and apparently nursing the Little Mannie his eyes came out on stalks and he backed off hastily, deciding his business with me could wait. To be fair, it was not long after the two incidents with his car.

When the time came for Pat to leave she handed Little Mannie back to me saying that we should find him much warmer and friendlier now (though cynics might say that the warmth was due to the way she had held and fondled him). We took him back to the

stores, and it seemed right that she should put him back into his box. The last thing that she did was to pull a few hairs out of her head and wrap them round him, saying that now he would be happy, since they both came from 'the Valley' – Longdendale – and he would have something from the Valley to keep him company.

She was only partly right, for although he gave little trouble for the next three or four years, he certainly exhibited all his old energy on the unfortunate information officer four years later. In fact there was relatively little opportunity. After the incidents with the designer's car Little Mannie did not make it to the first exhibition on Lindow Man in 1987. No serious students came to look at him, and the few visitors who did ask to see him showed little desire to handle him.

The first occasion when he made a public appearance was at the second Lindow Man exhibition in 1991. All my colleagues refused to handle him, and it fell to me not merely to do the accustomed preliminary work, but even to put him into position in the final display – a role which designers seem, as a rule, to jealously reserve for themselves. I cannot say there were any noticeable after-effects, save perhaps a slight recurrence of sciatica, which one might well simply ascribe to my having lifted too many stone heads for the exhibition.

The next ripple came during the exhibition, when an Africanist visiting the Museum pointed out that this was not a Celtic sculpture at all, but a *nomoli* figure from West Africa, more specifically from Sierra Leone. A cursory tour of our own collection of West African art produced some close relations and an almost exact parallel is on display in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Cambridge (accession no. 1934.1070). The huge face with its enlarged features, the flaring nostrils that gave it the beaky appearance, large and rather protruding eyes, and the 'horns' (in fact part of the hairstyle), even the slight forward thrust of the head, could all be paralleled in the art of the Mende people in Sierra Leone at least as far back as the mid-16th century, even though they are no longer made there today. Certainly all the features that were slightly unusual in 'Celtic' art sat comfortably on a Mende sculpture. Undamaged *nomoli* figures had complete arms and legs; their genitals were often enlarged and sometimes ithyphallic (there seems to be a memory that Little Mannie was once so endowed too) (Gower, 1980; Bankes, 1975, fig. 19). When it was finally identified by Dr John Nudds, the new Keeper of Geology at the Museum, the stone from which 'Little Mannie' was carved proved to be felsite, a hard fine-grained volcanic rock made up of feldspar and quartz, which is found in England but more importantly also occurs in West Africa.

The question now was how a *nomoli* figure came to be found under the floor of a house in west Derbyshire. Tony Ward again came up with a possible answer.

In the early 17th century there had been a considerable scandal in France when Urbain Grandier, the ambitious young priest at Loudun, some 40 miles (c. 64 km) south-west of Tours, had fallen foul of Cardinal Richelieu. The story is an unpleasant one, told in

detail by Aldous Huxley in *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) and adapted by John Whiting in his play *The Devils* (1961), and it is only necessary here to recount the relevant details.

Grandier, for all his vows of celibacy, was something of a ladies' man, and this failing had ultimately been engineered by Richelieu's agents into his becoming the focus for waves of hysteria or ecstasy in the local Ursuline convent. This in turn became a cause for an investigation by the Church, which led to his trial, torture and execution at the stake in 1634.

However, the nuns' hysteria and demonic possession continued after Grandier's death, no doubt fanned by the efforts of the Carmelite and Capuchin exorcists, and therefore Laubardemont, the Commissioner who had originally been sent by Richelieu to investigate the whole affair and who had sent Grandier to the stake, invited the Jesuits to exorcise the devils. The principal exorcist was Father Jean Joseph Surin; Huxley only says that he was accompanied by three other members of the Order, but Tony Ward (apparently quoting Pat Ellison) names one of his companions as a Father Gerard. It seems that there was an earlier Father Gerard who was on the run in England under Elizabeth I and left an account of his travels, but the priest who went to Loudun seems to have been a different and younger member of the same family. It appears that he was sent because these outbursts of hysteria among the nuns were apparently focussed on some kind of crude carving, and as a northern Englishman Father Gerard knew about such carvings – the 'Celtic' heads and statues found particularly in northern England – and he is reported to have brought the figure back to Derbyshire or Lancashire because the people there would know how to deal with it.

Huxley does not mention any such figure, but the enthusiasm with which the people of Loudun collected relics of both Grandier and his persecutors suggested that the current of fetishism ran strong in the town. It would certainly not be impossible for such an exotic figure to appear in western Europe at this time – one thinks for example of the 'magical mirror' belonging to John Dee, canon of Manchester Cathedral in the early 17th century, which was a polished obsidian mirror, one of many Aztec cult objects brought to Europe after the conquest of Mexico by Cortés between 1527 and 1530 (British Museum 1966,1001.1: *e.g.* Snodin 2009, 96–100 no. 108; Tait 1967, 195–212). An ithyphallic male statuette would certainly provide an appropriate focus for such hysteria in a female community.

Even though there is – as yet – no proven link between Derbyshire, Loudun, and Mendeland, there is a tenuous connection: Pat Ellison's mother was a Gerard, and she has referred to her family having had connections with the Douai Jesuits in Elizabeth I's reign; the story of Gerard bringing a figure back to England is said to stem from her. Direct descent from Father Gerard is at least unlikely and Pat herself knew nothing of this; the only French connection in her family to which she laid claim was through a de Launay, allegedly the son of Bernard René Jourdan, Marquis de Launay, Keeper of

the Bastille at the time of the French Revolution, who escaped to England and came to work for Dalton's dyeworks in Lancashire. Since the Marquis de Launay is recorded as having three daughters but no sons there would seem to be some misremembering or elaboration in the family history here, but in any case according to the other version of the story the figure had been removed to England in the previous century, and hence this seemed a blind alley, not worth following. However, she added that another branch of her family were heavily involved in the East African trade, so here is another possibility.

However, Pat did have another twist to add to the story.

Her family had once owned property in Derbyshire, and had given land to both the local Conservative and Liberal parties on which to build themselves social clubs (the Labour Party had apparently rejected the offer, not thinking such frivolity appropriate to a young and serious political party). Some time before this, probably around Christmas 1910, Pat's grandfather, who suffered from a heart condition, went out riding, despite his doctor's advice that his heart might not stand such exertion. However, he was a passionate horseman, the weather was fine and crisp and it was a glorious and irresistible winter's day. He came home exhilarated, saying that life was not worth living if one could not enjoy a ride in such weather, and announced his intention of taking a hot bath.

He was found dead on the bathroom floor, but could not be buried because the ground was frozen hard. His marriage is still known in the family as a real love match, and his young wife, deeply upset and pregnant with their seventh child, felt something (of him) must be buried at once to mark his death, so she went up to the cottages 'where they used to have meetings' (Pat's words), and seems to have buried something there. What she buried family tradition does not record, but the site occupied by these cottages (possibly already empty or even derelict at the time) was that which was later given to the Hollingworth Conservatives on which to build their club.

A string of coincidences, maybe, but long afterwards I learned that the Healeys too had suffered misfortunes once the Little Mannie came into their lives, misfortunes much more serious than any of those affecting the people who might be regarded as mere bit-players in the story. Nonetheless when the Manchester Museum appointed a new director in 1994 he was appalled to find that his 'scientific', 'academic' staff believed in such mumbo-jumbo, asked to see 'the Little Mannie', and duly took him out of his box, scoffingly.

Soon after, aforesaid Director is cycling along the Macclesfield Canal accompanied by his dog Pickwick. Pickwick sees some ducks and runs into the path of the bicycle. Bicycle and Director fall into canal, Director breaks thumb (Incident One). Later the same winter Director catches a cold, which turns into really nasty flu (Incident Two). No more scoffing over Little Mannie's powers. Indeed, 20 years later (and now long retired) he remains wary of the little figure's influences. Meanwhile Little Mannie himself (now

labelled as an 18th- or 19th-century *nomoli* figure from Sierra Leone – I have yet to work out how he came to Glossop) is currently comfortably resting in one of the 'Celtic Heads' drawers in the Discovery Centre, well-protected by a lock of hair provided by Pat Ellison in her role as one of the 'Guardians of the Old Ones' from Longdendale.

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Pat Ellison has answered my persistent queries as I delved into this story not just with patience but with an enthusiasm for which I am very grateful. Aside from those former colleagues in the Manchester Museum and elsewhere named in the text, I owe thanks to Katherine Baxter (Leeds Museums and Galleries) and Teresa Nixon (West Yorkshire Archives) for information on the Sidney Jackson archive, to Susan Martin for checking the details of 'Little Mannie' in the Manchester Museum database, to Steve Devine for taking the photographs and to Bryan Sitch, Deputy Head of Collections and Curator of Archaeology at the Museum for permission to publish him. And of course to the editors of this volume for giving me this opportunity – at long last – to bring the story of the Little Mannie to a wider audience.

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